Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

UN WOMEN

Mapping of Local CSOs in Refugee Response in Moldova

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Abbreviations and Terminology

ANAS	National Agency for Social Assistance
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FG	Focus Group
IG	Initiative Group
KII	Key Informant Interview
LPA	Local Public Administration
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support
MLO	Men-Led Organization
MSNA	Multi-Sector Needs Assessment
N	Number of respondents
NFIs	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
PSEA	Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RAC	Refugee Accommodation Center
RLO	Refugee-Led Organization
SADDD	Sex, Age and Disability Disaggregated Data
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WLO	Women-Led Organization
WOs	Women Organizations
WRO	Women's Rights Organization

The given research uses the following terminology:

Initiative Groups are non-formal groups of activists who come together voluntarily without any formal organizational structure or official rules defining their roles and responsibilities based on shared interests, values, or goals.

Men-led organizations are organizations that are governed or directed by men or whose leadership is principally made up of men, demonstrated by 50% or more occupying senior leadership positions.

Refugee-led organizations are organizations in which persons with direct lived experience of forced displacement play a primary leadership role (governing bodies involve refugees) and whose stated objectives and activities are focused on responding to the needs of refugees and related communities.

Organizations of Persons with Disabilities are organizations that are governed or directed by people with disabilities to promote the rights and interests of people with disabilities and to empower them to participate fully in society.

Women-led organizations are organizations that are governed or directed by women or whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50% or more occupying senior leadership positions.

Women's rights organizations are organizations that self-identify as women rights organizations with the primary focus of advancing gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights. WROs are also considered as those that have, as part of their mission statements, the advancement of women's and girls' interests and rights (or where 'women', 'girls', 'gender' or local-language equivalents are prominent in their mission statement). WROs are also considered as those that have, as part of their mission statement or objectives, the objective to promote positive social norms, to challenge and transform gender inequalities (unjust rules) as well as unequal power relations.

Women organizations is a collective term for both women's rights organizations and women-led organizations.

Executive Summary

The collective efforts of Moldovan civil society organizations (CSOs), including women-led organizations (WLOs), women's rights organizations (WROs), refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and initiative groups (IGs) have been instrumental in addressing the needs and promoting the rights of refugees from Ukraine who have sought protection in Moldova since the escalation of the conflict in February 2022. [1] Moldovan CSOs have played an important role in supporting and complementing the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Moldova, UN agencies and international NGOs, as well as the private sector and private citizens, to provide protection and services to refugees including at border reception points, in main urban centers and throughout the country.

Despite their involvement and critical role in the refugee response, there was no comprehensive overview of the CSO ecosystem in Moldova, which left a gap in coordination and synergies critical for an effective humanitarian response. In late 2022, UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, [2] commissioned a mapping of all local CSOs supporting the refugee response in Moldova, including WLOs, WROs, RLOs and IGs. [3] The objective was to better understand the landscape of service providers, and to identify existing capacities and opportunities to enhance and support their meaningful engagement and participation in the refugee response.

The resulting report presents key findings and recommendations based on the results of interviews and focus group discussions with 58 Moldovan CSO representatives and front line professionals carried out in March and April 2023, as well as the results of a survey conducted with almost two hundred CSOs in Moldova from January to February 2023.

[1] Women's organizations often have a grassroots presence in communities and can mobilize quickly to provide support in times of crisis. They also have links with other organizations and networks that can support their work and increase their impact. Because they have a deep understanding of the particular needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls, and other marginalized groups, they are often better equipped to respond to these challenges. They are also more likely to have a gender-sensitive approach and to understand the specific needs and concerns of women and girls. Finally, they are also more trusted by women and girls, who may feel more comfortable seeking support from women-led organizations.

[2] In the framework of the Refugee Coordination Forum, under the operational leadership of the Gender Task Force and the Inter-Agency Coordination Team.

[3] The focus was placed on these categories of organizations as globally recognized critical stakeholders in the refugee response, without a separate consideration of organizations led by minorities (persons with disabilities. Roma, LGBTQIA+ persons and others).

KEY FINDINGS

Moldovan CSOs, including WLOs and WROs, were engaged in the refugee response from the very onset, making maximum efforts to provide critical humanitarian assistance to refugees fleeing the escalation of hostilities in Ukraine. The large number of refugees crossing the border from Ukraine into Moldova initially left many CSOs and other stakeholders unprepared, and put a significant strain on existing capacities and systems. As the response evolved, CSOs were able to adapt and demonstrated a tireless commitment to supporting both refugees and Moldovan host communities impacted by the refugee influx.

2022 CSO Refugee Response Programs

- In 2022, the type of humanitarian assistance that CSOs provided varied, ranging from the provision of the NFIs to protection services, correlated with the actual needs of refugees identified in the 2022 MSNA. [4]
- The CSOs surveyed targeted a wide range of refugee population groups including adult women (88%), girls and boys under the age of 12 (76-77%), adolescent girls and boys (69-70%), adult men (61%), older women and men (48-59%), women and men with disabilities (32-36%), pregnant women (31%), Roma men and women (27-31%), survivors of GBV (16%) and LGBTQIA+ persons (11%), among others. [5]
- CSOs also assisted the most vulnerable members of the host community who were affected by the refugee influx. [6]
- CSOs delivered services for refugees country-wide, the majority reaching populations living in the main districts and large cities across Moldova. Assistance in remote or rural areas was provided less frequently, in particular if CSOs had no presence there. [7]

2023 CSO Refugee Response Plans

- In 2023, more CSOs plan to provide assistance to a greater number of refugees from Ukraine and affected host populations throughout Moldova, with a slight decrease in outreach across regions. Assistance provided by surveyed CSOs will shift away from emergency provisions to focus on medium- to long-term assistance that addresses protection as well as social and economic inclusion in line with the broader refugee response priorities.
- Women, children and adolescents, men, and older persons will remain the focus of assistance, while marginalized and at-risk groups will be targeted to a greater extent as compared to 2022, including women and men living with HIV, women engaging in the sale and exchange of sex, including those resorting to survival sex, LGBTQIA+ persons, GBV survivors, Roma women and men, persons with chronic diseases and persons with disabilities.
- If not addressed, limited availability of services in more remote areas of the country, and limited access to universally accessible transportation will impact the accessibility of services and effectiveness of the refugee response.
- Some surveyed CSOs expressed concerns about potential tensions between the refugee population and vulnerable host communities due to scarcity of resources and perceived favoritism of refugees. This underlines the importance of investing in social cohesion and inclusion activities and humanitarian-development-peace nexus initiatives.

[4] Assistance included NFIs (70%), food (68%), information (60%), education (52%), mental health and psycho-social support (45%), accommodation (37%), health (36%), water and hygiene (34%) and legal aid (30%). Type of assistance correlated to type of CSO: WROs provided information (85%), education (62%), employment and financial inclusion (50%), GBV (46%) and cash (35%), WLOs provided MHPSS (51%) and MLOs provided health services (40%) more often.

[5] The profile of beneficiaries varied depending on the type of organizations. MLOs more often targeted men with disabilities (33%) and chronic diseases (29%), Roma men (29%), LGBTQIA+ persons (17%) and HIV men (12%), than women organizations. Women organizations generally focused more on adult women (89-92%), children and adolescents (69-88%) of both sexes, older women (60-69%) and women with chronic diseases (32-35%) with WLOs putting a more prominent focus on adult men (66%) and older men (51%) and WROs on pregnant women (50%), women with disabilities (46%), lactating women (46%), survivors of Gender-Based Violence (42%), Roma women (35%), women engaging in the sale and exchange of sex, including those resorting to survival sex (12%).

[6] Services provided to the members of the host community included information (68%), non-food items (55%), food, education and extracurricular activities for children, psychological assistance, health services, hygienic items, legal assistance, solid fuel, as well as vouchers. WROs led on the provision of assistance to host communities on information (79%), NFIs (64%) and other assistance (64%), while MLOs on cash (22%).

[7] The Center region (43%) saw the highest engagement of CSOs in emergency response and Transnistria region (15%) the lowest, presumably due to the implications of the Transnistria region conflict on operational and funding challenges of CSOs. Depending on the type of organization, CSOs differently distributed assistance across the country, with MLOs being more present in the Chișinău municipality (44%) and Transnistria (19%), while WROs in the Center (58%), South (50%) and North (38%) regions.

Funding

- CSOs reported facing challenges with funding, including inflexible and short-term grants, complicated eligibility criteria and application procedures, and time-consuming reporting requirements.
- Humanitarian funding was often allocated to larger, more established organizations, rather than small grassroots ones.
- CSOs reported facing challenges obtaining information about funding opportunities and donors. [8]
- According to surveyed CSOs, donor support was not always aligned with the evolving needs of the affected people.
- The importance of institutional funding (e.g. for organizational expenses, such as staff, costs, strategy development or training) was stressed as key for the survival, development and expansion of women organizations, specifically those focusing on gender issues.
- Most surveyed CSOs reported not having secure funds for the 2023 refugee response, with WLOs and WROs reporting this more often than men-led organizations (MLOs).

Capacity

- Many CSOs reported staff shortages as one of the key organizational challenges, with WLOs and WROs struggling more than MLOs to recruit qualified staff and offer competitive salaries. [9]
- Understaffing in combination with the intense workload and emotional toll of the refugee response, has led to burnout and psychosocial distress among many frontline workers, with a higher percentage reported by WROs and WLOs than MLOs.
- Policies and procedures on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse are not yet in place for over 60% of the surveyed CSOs, especially in small and middle-size organizations.
- Despite putting significant pressure on the local labor market, the refugee response may have contributed to the overall strengthening of the skills and capacities in Moldova's labor force, particularly in the field of refugee protection, humanitarian work and social protection due to work experience gained during the response and capacity building opportunities.

Collaboration and Coordination

- Collaboration between CSOs, as well as among CSOs, INGOs and the UN was regarded as productive, leading to strategic partnerships and enhancing the efficiency of the response.
- Collaboration between CSOs and the local government varied across the country with some mixed experiences in Chișinău and the Northern region, due in part to the overstretched capacities of local public authorities (LPAs) to respond to the refugee influx, and a lack of practical tools to operationalize the response (e.g. a tool for the systemic collection, management, and distribution of population data at the local level). [10]
- Despite efforts to involve local CSOs in refugee coordination structures, only 25% of CSOs regularly participated in refugee coordination meetings, with WROs being the most active. [11] Low levels of participation were attributed to a limited clarity among CSOs about their role in refugee coordination, their limited ability to influence decisions, small numbers of staff which limited their capacity to attend many of the meetings, and to a lack of information about upcoming meetings.

[8] Since May 2023, the Refugee Coordination Forum has been publishing monthly updates with funding opportunities to CSOs in Moldova. The latest document, published on 1 July, is available in English and Romanian.

[9] This is a structural issue across all sectors in Moldova, not exclusively linked to the refugee response.

[10] Women organizations reported slightly higher levels of collaboration than MLOs, with INGOs, CSOs and local governments. Organizations from the Transnistria region ranked highest for their collaboration among CSOs possibly due to limited collaboration opportunities with other humanitarian actors in that conflict affected region.

[11] 58% of WROs reported participating in coordination forums, followed by WLOs (22%), MLOs (18%).

Gender-responsive Programming

- Women organizations played a more active role in adapting services to gender-based needs of refugees from Ukraine as opposed to other CSOs. Typically, these services focused on GBV prevention, psychological counseling and legal advice, economic recovery and leadership training for women and girls in humanitarian response.
- Many refugee response programs by surveyed CSOs specifically targeted women, girls, and boys, with less targeted attention paid to men, LGBTQIA+ persons, older persons, persons with chronic diseases and persons with disabilities. While this in part reflects the composition of the refugee population (with women and children comprising 85% of refugees who remained in Moldova), further attention should be paid to inclusivity to ensure that all groups of refugees have access to and are included in the response.
- Some 21% of CSOs reported mainstreaming gender in their programmes, out of which 74% reported collecting sex, age and disability disaggregated data (SADDD), 51% reported using this data to inform a gender analysis and 49% reported using SADDD and gender indicators to inform project implement and monitoring.
- Roughly half of CSOs reported not using gender equality and gender mainstreaming tools, with MLOs and smaller CSOs, as well as CSOs in rural areas having less capacity as compared to organizations located in Chișinău.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Efficiency and Effectiveness

1. Enable CSOs to respond to evolving needs of all refugees and members of the host communities, including underserved, vulnerable and marginalized groups, including:
    - Introduce flexibility in programme cooperation agreements so that CSOs can adapt to changing needs of affected people.
    - Invest in a “twin track” approach, combining both accessible/inclusive and targeted programmes to respond to needs of underserved groups including women with specific needs (e.g. pregnant and lactating women), survivors of the GBV, women engaging in the sale and exchange of sex, including those resorting to survival sex, people with disabilities and chronic diseases, Roma persons, women and men living with HIV, LGBTQIA+ persons, persons living in rural areas, adolescents, older persons, and male refugees.
    - Invest in addressing the medium- and long-term needs of refugees including those related to employment, business development, legal services, specialized medical services, education, and social and economic integration.
    - Encourage CSOs to deliver programs across humanitarian, development and peace nexus to effectively address the needs of the refugees and the members of the host communities, reinforce the national protection systems in place and contribute to the maintenance of peace in Moldova.
2. Strengthen CSO’s ability to collect and use sex–, age- and disability-disaggregated data for analysis to identify and respond to specific needs of distinct groups in specific sectors.
3. Enable CSOs to promote social cohesion and strengthen relationships between host communities and refugees by prioritizing social cohesion and inclusion projects and ensuring that both refugees and host communities benefit from their interventions and support.

Funding

4. Facilitate efforts by CSOs across Moldova, including smaller CSOs and CSOs from Transnistria region, to access funding for humanitarian response, including:
    - Prioritize localization of funding to achieve 25% of humanitarian funding channeled as directly as possible to local and national responders.
    - Simplify funding application procedures, adjust eligibility criteria and funding windows so that smaller CSOs can also benefit from accessing funds.
    - Create additional opportunities for dialogue and promote effective communication between donors and CSOs, including through inviting CSOs to participate in donor roundtables.
    - Support CSOs in diversifying their funding sources, including promoting their access to non-humanitarian funding opportunities, such as development grants and government funding.
5. Facilitate humanitarian reporting, in particular for smaller CSOs.

Strengthening Capacity

6. Invest in institutional development of CSOs, in particular smaller CSOs, WROs, WLOs and RLOs, including:
   - Provide funding for core costs including infrastructure and operational costs for CSOs, in particular WROs, WLOs and RLOs.
   - Invest in training, coaching and mentoring of CSO staff and management on relevant humanitarian procedures, tools, practices, and policies.
7. Invest in attracting and retaining qualified CSO staff, including:
   - Provide resources to support staff salaries, staff training and coaching to attract and retain qualified staff.
   - Provide resources for staff well-being, MHPSS support and supervision.
8. Strengthen emergency preparedness and response capacity of the local government through financial resources and technical support, including through investment in data collection and management systems.

Gender and Diversity Responsive Programs

9. Continue building the capacity of CSOs on key technical areas, including gender-responsive and intersectional programming, SADDD, monitoring, evaluation and learning, gender and intersectional analysis, and GBV prevention and response.
10. Continue strengthening the technical capacity of CSOs to provide targeted humanitarian assistance for underserved groups, including with multiple layers of vulnerability (e.g. refugees living with HIV, LGBTQIA+ persons, GBV survivors, persons with disabilities, Roma, etc.)

Collaboration, Coordination and Decision-making

11. Continue strengthening the inclusivity of humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including the Refugee Coordination Forum, to facilitate greater participation, in particular of smaller CSOs including:
    - Continue to build on good practices so that smaller CSOs or those with limited staff, can participate including scheduling hybrid meetings at strategic times, providing simultaneous interpretation, and running local refugee coordination forums in the local language.
    - Enhance the ability of CSOs to influence decisions in refugee coordination frameworks, and help them understand how they can play a strategic role in refugee coordination.
    - Ensure relevant information about the refugee response reaches actors in a timely and inclusive way, and ensure coordination meetings are well-structured and action oriented.
    - Invite refugee representatives to join coordination structures to strengthen meaningful participation of the affected people.
    - Promote greater integration between development, humanitarian and peace coordination mechanisms to promote meaningful participation of CSOs in the delivery of and the decision making around humanitarian, development and peace agendas in a more sustainable and inclusive manner.
12. Strengthen coordination, collaboration and peer learning among CSOs across Moldova by fostering platforms that allow CSOs from all regions of Moldova, including the Transnistria region, to exchange experiences, share good practices, promote learning and strengthen response.
13. Create more opportunities for meaningful participation and decision making of smaller and specialized CSOs in the refugee response by continuing organizing dedicated consultations with WROs, WLOs, RLOs, OPDs and LGBTQIA+ organizations; inviting CSO representatives to strategic discussions with the government, UN, INGOs and local authorities; including CSOs representatives in ongoing sector processes, and involving CSOs in decision-making.
14. Strengthen collaboration between CSOs and state structures at the national, regional and local levels, including:
    - Build on the good practice of the Local Refugee Coordination Forums, including documenting examples of positive collaboration between CSOs and LPAs in relevant regions, and using learning to strengthen cooperation in other regions.
    - Support and foster partnerships between CSOs and state structures to deliver effective and inclusive assistance to refugees and the most vulnerable members of the host communities, while promoting social cohesion and inclusion, and reinforcing the national social protection system.
    - Continue fostering forums for collaboration, coordination, consultations and policymaking to promote human rights across humanitarian, development and peace nexus.

For more details, please consult the full list of recommendations starting on page 35.

Introduction

Over one year since the escalation of the conflict following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, over 8,255,000 refugees have fled Ukraine to seek safety in other countries, including over 822,000 refugees who have crossed into the Republic of Moldova. As of May 2023, over 108,800 refugees have remained on the territory of Moldova, including over 80% women and children. [12] The country has set a global example in receiving, protecting and supporting refugees from Ukraine.

Since the onset of the refugee influx in February 2022, national and local civil society organizations (CSOs) have played an important role in the refugee response, supporting and complementing the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Moldova, UN and international NGOs, as well as the private sector and private citizens. CSOs including refugee- and women-led organizations, women's rights organizations and initiative groups have operated across the country, including at border reception points, in main urban centers and increasingly, in regions around Moldova. Their collective efforts have been instrumental in addressing the needs and promoting the rights of refugees from Ukraine seeking protection in Moldova.

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) affirms the crucial role played by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in refugee response due to their strong connections with local and displaced communities, demonstrating agility in the face of evolving circumstances, delivering necessary services in a culturally sensitive manner, 'grounding' the discussion around forced displacement, and helping to translate the abstract needs of refugees and the communities hosting them into tangible, actionable initiatives that can effectively respond to their needs. [13]

Despite the involvement of many CSOs in supporting the refugee response in Moldova, there was no country-wide overview of how many CSOs there are, what services they offer, where they operate, what populations they target, what their capacity is, or what their support and funding needs are. This has left a coordination and synergy gap critical for an effective humanitarian response.

[12] According to the data from the Informational Data Portal as of 14 May 2023: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/248?sv=0&geo=680

[13] United Nations, Global Compact on Refugees, New York, 2018: https://www.unhcr.org/media/37797

Objective and Methodology

In late 2022, UN Women and UNHCR [14] commissioned a mapping of local CSOs supporting the refugee response in Moldova, including women-led organizations (WLOs), women's rights organizations (WROs), refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and initiative groups (IGs) [15], in order to better understand the landscape of service providers, and to identify existing capacities and opportunities to enhance and support their meaningful engagement and participation in the refugee response. The specific objectives of the mapping were to:

- Produce a national mapping of CSOs engaged in the refugee response;
- Identify existing capacities, gaps and opportunities to strengthen CSO response to the needs of refugees and vulnerable Moldovans affected by the refugee influx;
- Explore opportunities for more inclusive and effective collaboration, coordination and participation of CSOs in the Refugee Coordination Forum;
- Identify how to better support the meaningful participation of women-led and women's rights organizations in refugee response coordination, contingency planning and decision-making.

Methodology

A mixed method approach was employed for this study, utilizing quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

Preparatory Phase: Sampling. The preparatory phase involved a review of secondary source data to identify local CSOs that were active in the refugee response in Moldova, including in the region of Transnistria. As no such overview existed, the research team carried out an extensive review of different government, public and social media sources, sent out official inquiries to state and NGO actors, and reached out to organizations bilaterally to check compliance with the criteria set. [16] As a result of the sampling exercise, 435 local CSOs were identified.

[14] In the framework of the Refugee Coordination Forum, under the operational leadership of the Gender Task Force and the Inter-Agency Coordination Team.

[15] The focus was placed on these categories of organizations as globally recognized critical stakeholders in the refugee response, without a separate consideration of organizations led by minorities (persons with disabilities. Roma, LGBTQIA+ persons and others).

[16] The exercise involved an analysis of different institutional sources to gather relevant information such as list of CSOs involved in the sector-specific refugee response, list of beneficiaries of the 2% law in 2022, list of CSOs operating in the health sector, data from the State Register of Legal Entities on Non-Commercial Organizations, CSOs catalog on www.ong.md, list of CSOs tagged in articles on www.civic.md, www.dopomoga.gov.md, information from the Alliance of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities, Network of Youth Friendly Health Centers, Platform for Gender Equality, National Coalition "Life Without Violence" and a variety of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Viber, Telegram and others. Continues on the next page.

Phase 1: Survey data collection. A self-administered online survey was conducted via email over the period 23 January to 17 February 2023, with the 435 organizations identified during the preparatory stage. A total of 197 organizations (45%) responded. [17] The survey was designed to capture the details of the profile and needs of CSOs and included 65 questions covering six thematic areas: (1) basic organizational information, (2) current refugee response capacity, (3) potential refugee response capacity, (4) participation in the Refugee Coordination Forum, (5) gender responsive approaches and (6) institutional capacity.

The information from the mapping is compiled into an open database in a variety of formats in order to inform and strengthen refugee coordination efforts. [18]

Phase 2: Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews. Six focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted between 1-27 March 2023 with CSO managers from each region of Moldova: North, Center, Chișinău, South, Transnistria, and separately with WLOs from the Central region of the country. A total of 48 CSO representatives of varied profile and specialization [19] participated, with 40 women and 8 men contributing to the discussions. The focus groups provided an opportunity to provide more qualitative information, including helping to analyze barriers and needs of CSOs in supporting the refugee response, and identifying actions to strengthen the engagement of local actors and coordination.

Ten key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted between 12-21 April 2023 with representatives from local authorities (CALM), UN Agencies (UN Women, UNHCR), a donor (Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)), and WLOs and WROs across all regions of Moldova, to further examine the impact of CSOs on the refugee response, challenges faced, and support requirements.

Limitations of the research included limited identification of CSOs under desk review (not all CSOs involved in refugee response could be identified), and the small sample size of refugee-led organizations and initiative groups. [20] As such, survey results should be seen as indicative. The findings, however, remain reliable and can serve as a basis for developing action plans to address the issues raised by the research.

To supplement the public secondary data analysis sources, additional official inquiries were sent to several government and non-governmental institutions having information on CSOs involved in the refugee response and generated some additional data. These include: Single Crisis Management Center, State Chancellery, National Agency for Social Assistance, National Agency for Public Services, Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova, International Organization for Migration, CSO "MAD-Aid Moldova", Center APRIORI, Movement of volunteers "Мы рядом", CSO "Женские инициативы", Center CONTACT, Moldova for Peace Platform.

For the review of the secondary sources, the specific selection criteria were applied to sample organizations that are active, local, and engaged in refugee response. Alongside the review of the information sources, the research team contacted organizations with limited public information via phone to check on the compliance with the selection criteria. This approach ensured that the sampling was accurate and reliable, and that the survey was conducted on a valid sample of CSOs.

[17] To ensure high response rate and valid data, the research team made up to nine follow-up calls to each organization to ensure comprehensive participation. During these calls, organizations were invited to confirm the submission of the questionnaire and offered technical assistance in filling it in, if necessary. Most of the organizations that did not participate in the survey confirmed by phone that they are not part of the target group - they were not involved (and did not plan to be involved) in the refugee response.

[18] Organizations gave their consent to be included in the mapping database and Services Advisor. Different formats include:

- Excel file to search and filter data on organizations as needed
- Services Advisor to visualize available services

Contact persons for data: Evghenia Hiora (evghenia.hiora@unwomen.org), Diego Nardi (nardid@unhcr.org).

[19] Including WLO, WRO, MLO, RLO, organizations of persons with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ organizations.

[20] Given the sample size for RLOs and IGs, these groups were merged with WLOs and MLOs.

Chapter I
Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Response

Moldovan CSOs were engaged in the refugee response from the very onset, making maximum efforts to provide critical humanitarian assistance to refugees fleeing the escalation of hostilities in Ukraine. The large numbers of refugees crossing the border from Ukraine into Moldova initially left many CSOs, as well as other stakeholders unprepared. The activation of the humanitarian coordination system, and related reporting requirements, further added to the intense workload of CSOs and other humanitarian actors. The emergency response put a significant strain on the institutional and programmatic capacities of local CSOs, impacting their ongoing programmes, as well as the work-life balance and emotional well-being of their staff. However, as the response evolved, CSOs were able to adapt and respond. As noted by several FGD participants:

> *None of us had any experience or expertise in this field (...). None of us were prepared to provide this assistance, but we were there, [ready and alert], and provided all kinds of support. (...) We learned a lot. From the perspective of absolute efficiency, probably we were not, but we managed to cover gaps and extinguish fires that were burning.*
>
> FGD participant, Chișinău

> *At first it was difficult, as we didn't know what needed to be done and how to help those people. During the first year we learned and helped a lot.*
>
> FGD participant, Chișinău

Profile of the Surveyed CSOs

The research attempted to capture the varied profile of local CSOs, including men-led organizations (MLOs), women-led organizations (WLOs), women's rights organizations (WROs), refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and initiative groups (IGs), [21] through the commissioning of a survey.

Years of Operation. A total of 197 CSOs responded to the survey, out of which almost all (98%) of organizations are legally registered. Nearly half of CSO respondents (47%) have been operating since 2009 or earlier, 14% were established between 2010-2014 and 39% were established in 2015 or later. [22] Some 8% of CSOs were established around the time that the Ukraine situation erupted.

Geographical Coverage. Over one third of CSOs (36%) are based in the municipality of Chișinău, while the remaining CSOs are evenly distributed across all regions of Moldova (including 18% in the Center, 16% in the North, 15% in the South and 15% in Transnistria region). Almost two thirds (72%) of CSO respondents are medium-sized with 7 to 35 employees each, 12% are large organizations with more than 36 employees, and 11% are small organizations with up to 6 staff.

Typology of CSOs. According to figure 1, out of the 197 CSO respondents, 72% were women organizations (58% WLOs and 13% WROs), 28% were MLOs, 3 were refugee-led organizations (1 led by women, and 2 led by men), and 2 were initiative groups (both led by men). These latter two groups have been included in the broader categories of WLO and MLO throughout the document to enhance data presentation and analysis.

Governing Body. [23] Out of the 197 respondents, 92% of CSOs have women in the governing bodies of their organizations, including 76% in which women comprise more than 50% of their governing body, and 21% in which men comprise more than 50%. [24]

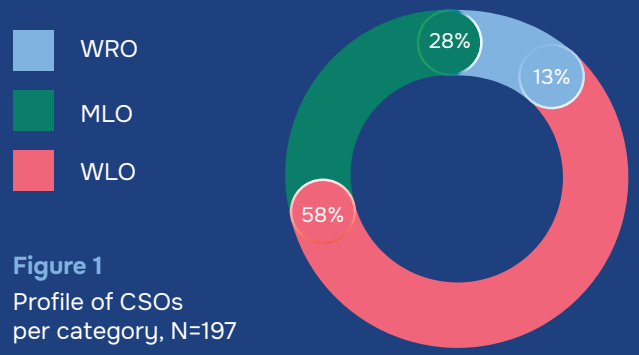


Figure 1
Profile of CSOs per category, N=197

CSO Refugee Response Programs in 2022

ASSISTANCE TO THE REFUGEE POPULATION

Out of the 197 CSOs surveyed, 89% provided assistance to refugees from Ukraine in 2022. [25] The largest share of assistance provided by CSOs was in the Center region (43%), followed by the South (37%), North (35%) and Chișinău (35%) regions. Some 15% of CSOs surveyed reported providing assistance in the region of Transnistria, which hosted less than 10% of refugees. The geographical distribution of assistance varied depending on the type of CSO. While MLOs provided most of the assistance in Chișinău municipality (44%), WROs placed a more prominent focus on the provision of assistance in the Center (58%), South (50%) and North (38%) regions, followed by WLOs with 42% for the Center and 35% for the North and South regions.

[21] Please see the definition of these terms under "Abbreviations and Terminology" section.

[22] Please note that "established" does not equal "registered". Organizations that are not officially registered provided information on the year they have been established as groups.

[23] The governing body of an organization refers to a group of individuals who are responsible for overseeing the strategic direction, policies, and operations of the organization, and are distinct from the management of the organization. This group may be referred to by different names depending on the type of organization, such as a board of directors, a board of trustees, or a governing council. The governing body is responsible for setting the overall mission and goals of the organization, providing guidance and oversight to management, ensuring the organization's financial stability and sustainability, and representing the interests of stakeholders such as shareholders, members, or the public. They may also be responsible for appointing and evaluating the performance of senior executives or other key personnel.

[24] MLOs on average have fewer women in their governing bodies, with 13% of MLOs having no women, 30% having less than 50% women, and 46% having more than 50% women. No MLOs are governed exclusively by women. Women organizations similarly have lesser representation of men in their governing bodies, with 46% WROs and 37% WLOs having no men, 38% WROs and 52% WLOs having less than 50% men and 8% WROs and 10% WLOs having more than 50% men in their governing bodies. Some 4% WROs and 1% WLOs are governed exclusively by men.

[25] The remaining 11% of CSOs intended to provide assistance to refugees in 2023.

While CSOs had a presence and provided services in all regions of Moldova, including the Transnistria region, assistance focused on large cities rather than smaller towns and villages, likely corresponding to the uneven distribution of the refugee population which was largely living in urban centers. For example, the bulk of assistance was concentrated in large cities including Chișinău municipality (35%) Bălți (20%), Cahul (17%), Stefan Voda (17%) and Tiraspol (10%). Geographical coverage of services was linked to the presence of CSOs in particular areas, to the distribution of the refugee population, as well as to donor support to organizations in these regions. [26]

In 2022, the main type of assistance provided to refugees included: NFIs (70% of CSOs), food (68%), information (60%) and education (52%), followed by mental health and psychosocial support services (45%), accommodation (37%), health (36%), water, sanitation and hygiene (34%) and legal aid (30%). A smaller percentage of services focused on employment and inclusion (provided by 26% of CSOs), transportation (23%), cash assistance (20%), response to domestic and sexual violence (16%) and protection (15%) (see Figure 4). The main type of assistance provided by CSOs largely corresponds to the priority humanitarian needs identified by refugees in the 2022 multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA), including food, accommodation and health care (reported as needs by 69%, 43% and 43% of refugees respectively). [27]

The type of assistance provided differed according to the category of CSO. Women organizations led on the provision of education (62% WROs and 58% WLOs, compared to 38% MLOs), MHPSS services (50% WROs and 51% WLOs, compared to 33% MLOs) and employment and financial inclusion (50% WROs and 26% WLOs, compared to 15% MLOs). WROs provided information (85%), transportation (38%) and GBV services (46%) significantly more often than other types of organizations.

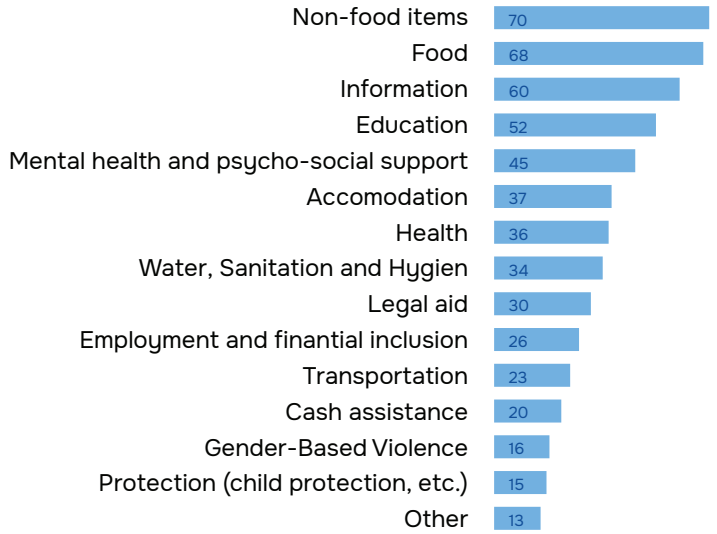


Figure 3:
Type of assistance provided to refugees in 2022 (multiple choice), N=176, % of organizations [28]

During focus group discussions, CSOs reported an occasional mismatch between the services provided and the actual needs of refugees, due either to a lack of consultation with affected people about their needs, or to a lack of flexibility in the program conditions, which limited the ability to adjust planned assistance in light of changing needs. This has been more pronounced in rural areas, including in Transnistria region, where according to FGDs assistance was limited and/or not tailored to the needs of beneficiaries: "people outside Chișinău or outside large urban areas suffered from the

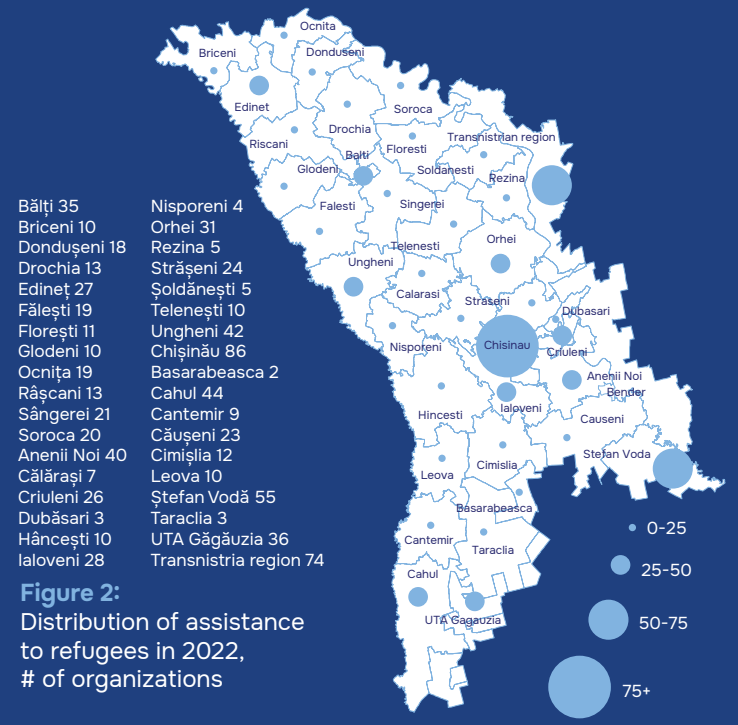


Figure 2:
Distribution of assistance to refugees in 2022, # of organizations

[26] Transnistria region was covered less than other regions presumably due to political-related challenges for INGOs and the UN to transfer funds there.

[27] Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, September 2022 - Link

[28] For better alignment with the terminology used under Refugee Coordination Forum terms "Water and Hygiene" and "Sexual and Domestic Violence" were replaced with "Water, Sanitation and Hygiene" and "Gender-Based Violence" respectively.

lack of services." [29] Respondents highlighted the difficulties rural-based refugees faced finding employment and educational opportunities, requiring those living in remote areas to commute or relocate to larger cities and towns to access services. [30] The cost of commuting, and/or the lack of accessible transport for people with mobility challenges served as barriers to access.

Language barriers and sensitivities around the use of Russian language [31] at times hindered communication of organizations with refugees.

In 2022, the main target groups for CSO services were refugee women (88%), boys and girls below the age 12 years (77% and 76% respectively), and adolescent boys and girls (70% and 69% respectively). Refugee men as well as older women and men were targeted to a slightly lesser extent (61%, 59% and 48% respectively). A smaller percentage of refugee assistance targeted [32] lactating women (32%), pregnant women (31%), persons with disabilities (32-36%), Roma persons (27-31%), persons with chronic diseases (27-31%), with men being slightly less targeted than women. The least assistance was targeted to refugee survivors of GBV (16%), women and men living with HIV (9-11%), LGBTQIA+ persons (11%) and women engaging in the sale and exchange of sex, including those resorting to survival sex (10%). [33]

These target groups largely correspond to the demographics of the refugee population from Ukraine, the majority being women and children. However, respondents noted the importance of identifying the specific needs of diverse groups of refugees, to ensure that services are available and inclusive for all, including older persons, persons with disabilities, and Roma refugees, as well as male refugees who may be unintentionally excluded from assistance, despite their vulnerability.

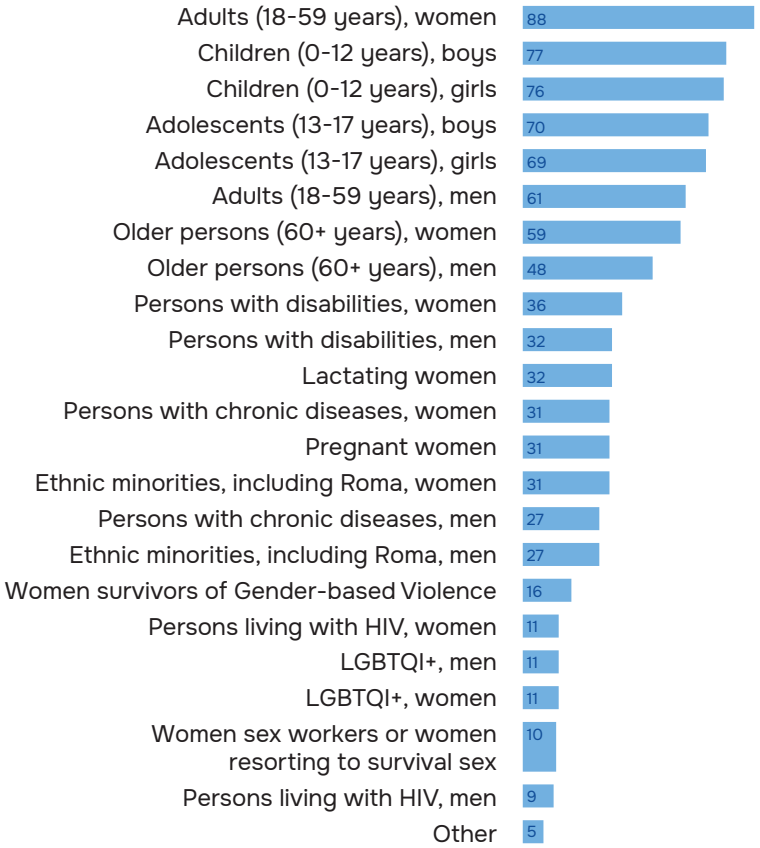


Figure 4:
Target refugee beneficiaries in 2022 (multiple choice), N=176, % of organizations

> *There are persons with disabilities, persons with specific needs and older persons in rural areas who can not commute to larger cities to receive vouchers or other assistance.*
>
> FGD participant, South

> *Practically, there is no accessible transportation for persons with disabilities, both adults and children, older persons, as well as other persons with mobility issues.*
>
> FGD participant, North

[29] FGD participants, Chișinău.

[30] This is a structural issue to Moldova, affecting all citizens in rural areas, not specific to the refugee response, but highlights the challenges of the broader operational context.

[31] A number of refugees do not speak Russian, only Ukrainian, others prefer not to speak Russian, as language of aggressor. Some CSOs staff are not fluent in Russian.

[32] Targeted means % of organizations that provided services to specific target groups.

[33] MSNA 2022 reinforces the findings of the given research, identifying women as 67% of the total Ukrainian refugee population in Moldova, out of which 49% are aged 18-59, and highlighting 63% of the refugee population having children. Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, September 2022: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95884

The number of refugees reached by individual CSOs varied across types of organizations and regions. Over one quarter of CSOs (27%) reported assisting between 301 and 3,000 persons each in 2022. There were, however, regional differences, with CSOs in the Center region (31%) providing assistance to up to 50 persons and in CSOs in Chișinău municipality (31%) to over 3,000 persons . The majority of WROs (41%) provided assistance to 101–300 persons each, WLOs (31%) to 301-3,000 persons each, and MLOs (27%) to over 3,000 persons each.

ASSISTANCE TO HOST COMMUNITIES

In 2022, 44% of CSOs assisting refugees also provided assistance to host communities. This assistance was geographically concentrated in the Central (43%), South (32%) and North regions (28%) of Moldova. Some 21% of CSOs assisted members of the host communities in Chișinău municipality and 13% in the Transnistria region. Assistance to host communities was concentrated in the larger districts of the country, such as Chișinău (21%), Stefan Voda (14%), Bălți (13%), Anenii Noi (10%), Cahul (9%), Orhei (9%), Ungheni (9%) and Tiraspol (9%).

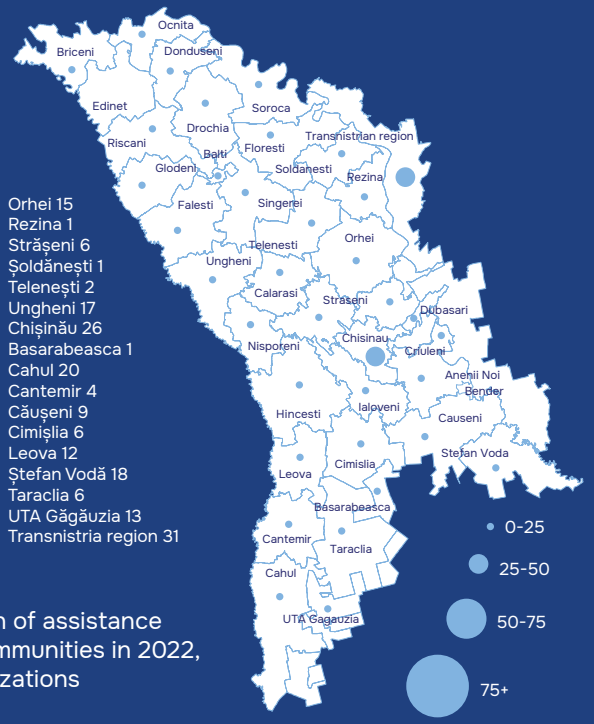
By region, all types of CSOs concentrated support to host communities in the Center region. At the same time, WROs were most present in the North (43%), Center (50%), South (50%) regions and in Chișinău municipality (29%), while WLOs in the Transnistria region (14%).

The figure 7 illustrates that in 2022, the main type of assistance provided to affected host communities included: information (68%) and non-food items (55%), with WROs leading on the provision of assistance to host communities on information (79%), NFIs (64%) and other assistance [34] (64%), while MLOs led on cash (22%).

The target groups for services among host communities included extended families (targeted by 56% of CSOs), couples with children (51%), single headed female households (49%) and couples without children (40%). Single headed male households, who are fewer in number than single headed female households, were targeted less often for assistance (30%). The data suggests that WLOs supported extended families (62%), couples with children (54%) and single men households (34%) to a greater extent than MLOs and WROs. WROs provided more support to single women households (64%) and couples without children (50%).

Most CSOs (33%) provided assistance to up to 50 members of the host community each, predominantly in the North, Center and South regions. While in Chișinău municipality 31% of CSOs assisted from 301-3,000 beneficiaries each, in the Transnistria region 33% of CSOs provided support mostly to 101–300 persons each . MLOs and WLOs predominantly provided assistance to up to 50 beneficiaries of the host communities each (34-35%), while WROs to 101 - 300 persons each (43%).

Organizations had to navigate the assistance to refugees and host communities with caution, to prevent and manage potential tensions among host communities arising from perceived favoritism in assistance for refugees. FGD participants emphasized the need for proactive efforts to prevent future tensions and reinforce social cohesion and integration.



Bălți 11
Briceni 3
Dondușeni 4
Drochia 2
Edineț 18
Fălești 2
Florești 3
Glodeni 4
Ocnița 6
Râșcani 2
Sângerei 2
Soroca 2
Anenii Noi 14
Călărași 4
Criuleni 7
Dubăsari 2
Hâncești 6
Ialoveni 4
Orhei 15
Rezina 1
Strășeni 6
Șoldănești 1
Teleneşti 2
Ungheni 17
Chișinău 26
Basarabeasca 1
Cahul 20
Cantemir 4
Căușeni 9
Cimișlia 6
Leova 12
Ștefan Vodă 18
Taraclia 6
UTA Găgăuzia 13
Transnistria region 31

Figure 5:
Distribution of assistance to host communities in 2022, # of organizations

[34] Other assistance included food, education and extracurricular activities for children, psychological assistance, health services, hygiene items, legal assistance, fuel, and vouchers.

CSO Refugee Response Programs in 2023

ASSISTANCE TO THE REFUGEE POPULATION

In 2023, more CSOs surveyed (92%) expressed the intent to provide assistance to refugees from Ukraine as compared to those who provided assistance in 2022 (89%).

The geographical area of planned assistance is similar to 2022, with a focus on the regions of Chișinău, Center, North, South and Transnistria, but with a slight decrease in outreach across regions. The largest percentage of CSOs (38%) plan to provide assistance in the Center region and the smallest percentage in the Transnistria region (16%). Overall, assistance centers around the large districts of the country, such as Chișinău, Anenii Noi, Bălți, Cahul and Tiraspol.

According to survey respondents, organizations plan to focus assistance on the sectors of information (65%), education (61%) and non-food items (55%). CSOs will also provide mental health and psycho-social support services (48% of CSOs), legal aid (35%), employment and inclusion (33%), protection (25%), and domestic violence (19%), an increase as compared to 2022.

At the same time, FGDs respondents identified social integration and employment as key priorities for the refugee response in 2023, along with education for children [35], medical services and rehabilitation for older persons, persons with disabilities and chronic diseases, legal assistance in rural areas, cash support, and housing support. Romanian language courses were also recommended to foster inclusion, employment, and education, particularly in the South region.

In 2023, the main target groups for CSO services are similar to those targeted in 2022 and include: women (90%), adolescent girls (84%), girls (82-84%) and boys (76-72%), adult men (74%) and older women and men (60-63%). In 2023, an increased focus on specific target groups is expected, as compared to 2022 including: women and men living with HIV (23-24%, compared to 11% in 2022), women engaging in the sale and exchange of sex, including those resorting to survival sex (24%, compared to 10% in 2022), LGBTQIA+ persons (25%,

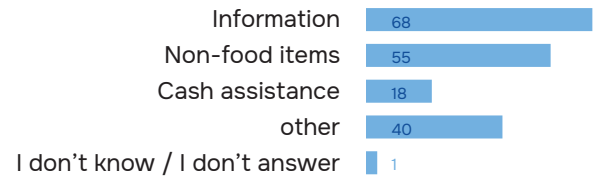


Figure 6:
Type of assistance provided to members of host communities in 2022 (multiple choice), N=87, % of organizations

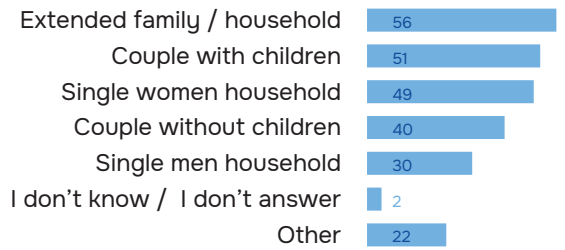
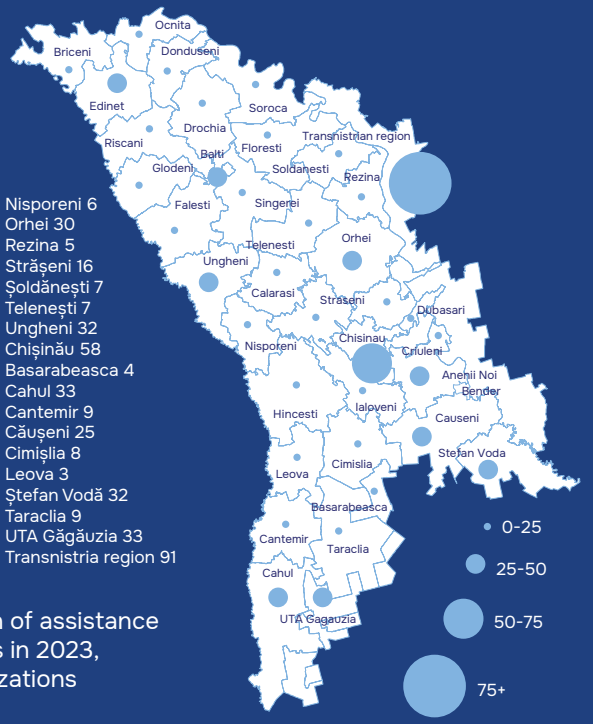


Figure 7:
Target host communities' beneficiaries in 2022 (multiple choice), N=87, % of organizations



Bălți 32
Briceni 11
Dondușeni 20
Drochia 14
Edineț 29
Fălești 10
Florești 11
Glodeni 17
Ocnița 19
Râșcani 18
Sângerei 12
Soroca 15
Anenii Noi 37
Călărași 6
Criuleni 14
Dubăsari 4
Hâncești 7
Ialoveni 13
Nisporeni 6
Orhei 30
Rezina 5
Strășeni 16
Șoldănești 7
Teleneşti 7
Ungheni 32
Chișinău 58
Basarabeasca 4
Cahul 33
Cantemir 9
Căușeni 25
Cimișlia 8
Leova 3
Ștefan Vodă 32
Taraclia 9
UTA Găgăuzia 33
Transnistria region 91

Figure 8:
Distribution of assistance to refugees in 2023, # of organizations

[35] Including school enrollment, counseling on equivalence of grades and validity of study documents, in-kind support for online studies.

compared to 11% in 2022), survivors of Gender-Based Violence (33%, compared to 16% in 2022), Roma women and men (32-36%, compared to 27-31% in 2022), persons with chronic diseases (37-38%, compared to 27-31% in 2022), and persons with disabilities (44-42%, compared to 32-36% in 2022).

FGD respondents reported that refugees from rural areas and mothers with small children, with little to no financial resources and unable to work because of lack of childcare, were among the most vulnerable groups. Discrimination against Roma was also raised as a concern, as was a lack of services for LGBTQIA+ persons, older people, persons living with HIV [36] and people with disabilities in the South region. FGD participants suggested that LGBTQIA+ persons may be reluctant to seek assistance because they fear discrimination.

In 2023, the target number of refugees that CSOs plan to reach has increased, as compared to 2022: 37% of CSOs report being able to reach from 301 to 3,000 beneficiaries each (compared to 27% in 2022), while 24% of CSOs plan to reach from 101 to 300 beneficiaries each (compared to 20% in 2022).

ASSISTANCE TO HOST COMMUNITIES

In 2023, the percentage of CSOs planning to assist host communities has risen to 63% (as compared to 44% in 2022).

In 2023, the geographic reach of services to host communities is similar to that of 2022, covering Chișinău, Center, North, South and Transnistria regions. Overall, assistance centers around the large districts of the country, such as Chișinău (19%), Bălți (11%), Cahul (11%), Orhei (11%), Ungheni (10%) and Tiraspol (9%). As with services to refugees, the geographical coverage will slightly decrease the across regions. The largest percentage of CSOs plan to provide services to host communities in the Center region (38%), while the fewest percentage of CSO will service host communities in the Transnistria region (16%).

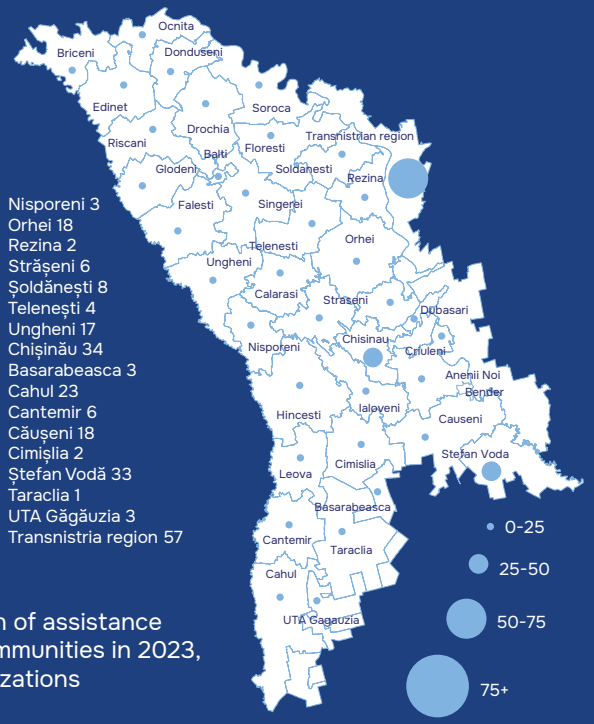
In 2023, the type of services CSOs plan to deliver to host communities includes: information (78%), non-food items (54%) and cash (15%), similar to 2022.

According to FGDs respondents, priority needs of vulnerable host community members include: information on assistance available, NFIs (including hygiene products, mattresses, blankets, bed linen), cash for utilities, food, infrastructure repairs, and MHPSS services, as well as social cohesion initiatives:

> *We need ... social cohesion activities for refugees and those from the community, especially in rural localities where they live more side by side.*
>
> FGD participant, WRO/WLO Chișinău

In 2023, the priority target groups among host communities include couples with children (65% of CSOs), a shift from the 2022 priority target group of extended families (56%). The data suggests that CSOs will put slightly less emphasis on assistance to host community single women households and more on host community couples without children and single male headed households, as compared to 2022.

In 2023, the number of host communities that CSOs plan to reach is similar to 2022: 34% of CSO plan for between 1 to 50 beneficiaries, 21% for 301-3,000 persons, 18% for 51–100 beneficiaries and 14% for 101–300 persons each. [37]



Bălți 20
Briceni 5
Dondușeni 15
Drochia 3
Edineț 10
Fălești 1
Florești 6
Glodeni 3
Ocnița 10
Râșcani 5
Sângerei 8
Soroca 1
Anenii Noi 8
Călărași 5
Criuleni 9
Dubăsari 3
Hâncești 5
Nisporeni 3
Orhei 18
Rezina 2
Strășeni 6
Șoldănești 8
Teleneşti 4
Ungheni 17
Chișinău 34
Basarabeasca 3
Cahul 23
Cantemir 6
Căușeni 18
Cimișlia 2
Ștefan Vodă 33
Taraclia 1
UTA Găgăuzia 3
Transnistria region 57

Figure 9: Distribution of assistance to host communities in 2023, # of organizations

[36] Through ongoing partnership between UNAIDS, local CSOs and the National HIV Programme, as of the end of January 2023, 217 Ukrainian refugees were included in ARV treatment by the National HIV Program and more than 5,000 refugees had received integrated prevention and support services from 10 local CSOs. CSOs participating in the survey may lack knowledge about such specialized services, which suggest a need for strengthened information sharing on the matter. In collaboration with UNHCR, UNAIDS has developed specific FAQs on access for HIV, available in Romanian and Russian.

[37] In 2023, based on survey projections, CSOs have the capacity to reach 47,000 host community members, as compared to 39,000 in 2022. This is 44% out of the total population of host communities targeted under the RRP2023: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/276?sv=0&geo=680

Chapter II
Funding

Funding is crucial for CSOs to carry out their activities, programs, and projects, and to achieve their mission and objectives. It enables CSOs to provide essential services, advocate for their causes effectively, and innovate in their approaches to addressing social issues. Funding also provides financial stability and sustainability, helps to build partnerships and networks, and allows CSOs to plan and execute long-term strategies that produce a lasting impact.

The capacity of CSOs to substantially contribute to the refugee response is highly dependent and directly proportional to donor support:

> *If it wasn't for that funding from international partners, I believe we would not have been able to respond to the refugee influx the way we did at that moment.*
>
> FGD participant, Chișinău

Over half of CSOs (61%) reported receiving funding from INGOs and around one third of organizations reported their own sources (34%). [38] 20% of CSOs received funding from UN agencies, while 26% reported other funding sources, such as local businesses and private donations. 1% of organizations reported receiving state funding through the Ministries of Education and Research, and Culture.

A greater percentage of WROs and WLOs reported receiving funding from INGOs (85% and 64% respectively as compared to 45% MLOs) and UN agencies (42% and 17% respectively as compared to 14% MLOs), while MLOs more often use their own source of funds (43% as compared to 31% and 30% for WROs and WLOs).

In 2022, the annual budgets [39] of CSOs varied significantly. A small percentage of CSOs (8%) reported an annual budget of less than 5,500 USD, while a little under one third of CSOs (29%) reported an annual budget of between 5,501 and 55,500 USD. A similar percentage of CSOs (27%) reported a medium annual budget of between 55,501 to 554,300 USD, while the smallest percentage of CSOs (9%) reported a large annual budget of over 554,300 USD. A larger percentage of WROs (35%) and MLOs (21%) manage budgets of 55,501

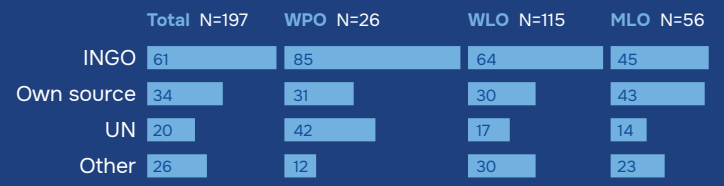


Figure 10:
CSOs funding sources in 2022, (multiple choice), N=197, % of organizations

[38] The research data does not define the term of "own sources". This category was added by organizations and may imply revenues from 2% law, revenues from entrepreneurial activities and other sources.

[39] The term "budget" is defined as an organization's overall yearly budget, including both operational and programmatic budgets.

to 554,300 USD, while a larger percentage of WLOs (35%) manage annual budgets of 5,501 to 55,500 USD.

In 2022, most CSOs re-allocated portions of their existing budgets to support refugees. Some 25% of CSOs allocated less than a quarter of their budget to the refugee response, while 19% allocated over three quarters of their budget to the response. [40] WROs allocated a larger percentage of their budgets to the refugee response as compared to WLOs and MLOs.

In early 2023, 78% of CSOs anticipated challenges in securing funding for the 2023 refugee response, out of these 82% WLOs, 77% WROs and 71% were MLOs. [41]

Among the CSOs surveyed, 8% did not plan to work on the refugee response in 2023 (12% WROs, 9% MLOs and 6% WLOs), due in part to lack of funding, complicated reporting requirements, limited staff and a high workload. As noted by one FGD respondent:

> *Donors require monthly and quarterly reports, the requirements are very high and CSOs are overstretched. We have to adapt to different forms, budgets, financial reports, but we also have our own internal ones, which we need to fill in alongside all others. It is difficult, and some CSOs simply gave up.*
>
> FGD participant, South

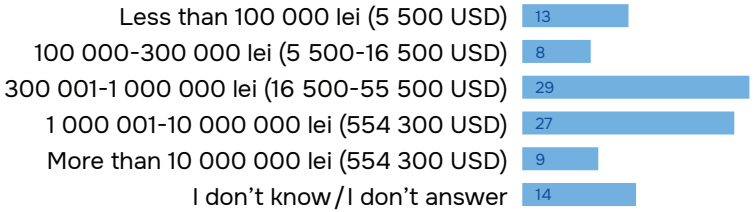


Figure 11:
CSOs annual budget, N=197, % of organizations

CSOs faced several funding challenges including: lack of information about funding opportunities, [42] not being able to meet the funding eligibility criteria, complicated application procedures with short deadlines, time-consuming reporting requirements, and limited access to flexible [43] and long-term funding. Strict donor requirements also meant that it was difficult to change the content of services after an agreement was signed, making it challenging to respond to evolving refugee needs. CSOs highlighted the pressure of stringent reporting requirements and *"an impressive degree of bureaucracy"* that came with the international funding.

Respondents noted that CSOs in Moldova are relatively small and may not have the experience or capacity to meet the requirements of donors to obtain funding or support. Thus, larger CSOs, with relevant experience and human resources, can more easily access these funds and other related opportunities. As funding is often allocated to larger organizations, this effectively marginalizes small, grassroots organizations.

> *To access resources from the international organizations, local organizations had to step back from refugee response and the direct assistance of refugees to write reports, interim plans, etc.*
>
> FGD participant, Chișinău

[40] The research data does not allow to clearly conclude whether organizations re-allocated their regular resources (potentially compromising their ongoing development projects) or budgets with new funding for the refugee response.

[41] The funds' absorption capacity of CSOs for the refugee response in 2023 varies significantly across organizations, roughly correlating with their annual budget. Organizations from the Chișinău municipality are more able to absorb budgets of 55,501-553,300 USD and beyond, while CSOs in Transnistria region on average have lesser absorption capacities with the maximum absorption capacity for the budgets below 5,500 USD. The absorption capacity for MLOs and WLOs is more or less uniform across all categories (9-20%), while for WROs it ranks highest (42%) for the budgets of 16,501-55,500 USD and 27% for the budgets of 55,501-553,300 USD.

[42] As of May 2023, and responding to requests by CSOs, the Refugee Coordination Forum Inter-Agency Coordination Team has been consolidating information on available funding opportunities for local CSOs in Moldova and sharing it regularly with all partners.

[43] Allowing for budget revisions and reprogramming to align with the changing context and needs.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

There is a number of available mechanisms for CSOs to access funding from the government in Moldova, including:

In 2016, the government of Moldova adopted the **2% Mechanism** [1], an indirect state support mechanism, to support civil society organizations, allowing taxpayers to allocate 2% of their income tax to CSOs to mobilize domestic resources and diversify their income base.

As of 2017, Moldova developed a **Small Grants Program** [2] for CSOs to support and promote senior participation and active ageing in Moldova.

The **Law on Youth** [3] allows for financial grants to support CSOs in provision of the community-specific youth services, development of youth services infrastructure, and provision of spaces and equipment to youth organizations.

Under the **Law on Inclusion of People with Disabilities** [4] the state provides tax relief for specialized organizations [5], partially subsidizes the procurement of equipment and job creation for people with disabilities, as well as partially compensates the social insurance contributions to organizations making part of the Society of Invalids, the Society of the Blind and the Association of the Deaf in the Republic of Moldova.

Moreover, according to the **Law on Non-Commercial Organizations** [6], in case a CSO is attributed with the status of public benefit, it is entitled to support from the central and local public authorities, including tax reliefs, right to use public property free of charge or on preferential terms, non-reimbursable financing, special-purpose financing and social procurement.

In September 2022, the government of Moldova drafted a **Framework Regulation on the Mechanism of Non-reimbursable Funding for Projects of Non-commercial Organizations** [7] to financially support projects of national, regional or local public interest in different development areas and that according to the State Chancellery will soon become functional.

[1] Art. 8(1)(d) of the Fiscal Code of Moldova, No. 1163 dated 24.04.1997.

[2] The last edition of 2022 can be accessed here.

[3] Art. 8(1) of the Law on Youth, No. 215 dated 29.07.2016.

[3] Art. 36(2) of the Law on Inclusion of People with Disabilities, No. 60 dated 30.03.2012

[4] Organizations whose capital is owned 100% by the companies and associations of persons with disabilities, in which more than 50% of all employed workers are persons with disabilities.

[5] Art 23(1) of the Law on Non-commercial Organizations, No. 86 dated 11.06.2020.

[6] The draft Framework Regulation is available here.

[7] Art. 8(1)(d) of the Fiscal Code of Moldova, No. 1163 dated 24.04.1997.

Chapter III Institutional Capacity of CSOs

CSO institutional capacity refers to the internal structures, procedures, and operational, human resources and financial management systems that help an organization effectively and efficiently achieve its mission and objectives. Strong institutional capacity enables CSOs to build trust and credibility with their stakeholders, respond to the needs of their beneficiaries and communities, adapt their approaches, and ensure sustainability and long-term impact. Ultimately, strong institutional capacities are essential for CSOs to make a positive impact on society.

Staffing and Volunteers

Out of 197 organizations surveyed, 141 CSOs (almost two thirds or 72%) are medium-sized organizations with 7 to 35 employees each, 24 CSOs (12%) are large organizations with more than 36 employees and 22 CSOs (11%) are small organizations with up to 6 staff each. On average, CSOs employ 7 full-time and 3 part-time employees, and the maximum number of full-time employees contracted by an individual CSO was 215. Whereas 61% of CSOs engage volunteers in their activity, 36% do not. On average, CSOs have 2 full-time and 5 part-time volunteers, the maximum reported number of volunteers working with one CSO was 200.

On average, WROs and WLOs have less full-time employees than MLOs (5.2 and 4.6 respectively, as compared to 11.5 for MLOs) as well as fewer part-time employees (2.5 and 2.9 respectively, as compared to 3.6 for MLOs). The number of full-time and part-time volunteers is similar among WROs (0.8 and 3.9), WLOs (2.1 and 5.8) and MLOs (2.7 and 4.0). Employment of refugees in CSOs, both as full and part-time staff, remains limited across all types of CSOs, as does involvement of refugees as volunteers, with an average of 0.83 refugees per organization.

Almost half of CSOs (46%) reported staff shortages. [44] A higher proportion of organizations in the Center (47%) and Chișinău (54%) regions encountered this issue, as compared to other regions. Over half of WROs (54%) and WLOs (50%) reported staff shortages, while fewer MLOs (32%) expressed the same concern. Understaffing affects many categories of employees, from project staff to management and humanitarian coordinators.

The primary reasons reported for staff shortages include low/non-competitive salaries, making it difficult to attract qualified candidates, and lack of qualified staff in the country. A greater percentage of WROs (86%) and WLOs (81%) reported inability to offer competitive salaries to meet the expectations of potential employees, as compared to MLOs (56%). The heavy workload also posed a challenge to recruiting and retaining staff. As noted by one CSO respondent:

> *It is difficult to recruit and retain staff who are] able and willing to quickly adapt to the changing nature of the refugee response , staff willing to get involved and ready to work overtime. It is very, very hard.*
>
> FGD participant, WROs/WLOs Chișinău

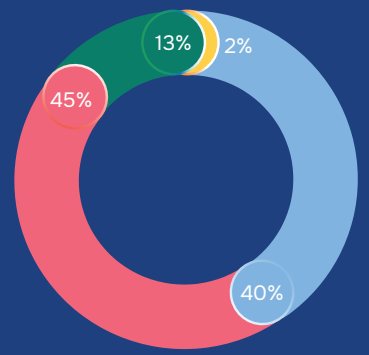
Staff burnout was another factor linked to the shortage of staff, reported by 20% of CSOs, with a larger proportion of WROs (36%) and WLOs (21%) reporting this as an issue compared to MLOs (6%). This difference may be due to the fact that women organizations on average have less staff as compared to MLOs, exposing employees to compromised work-life balance and increased risks of burnout. The importance of providing supervision and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to frontline staff was noted by several respondents.

The unpredictability of funding, the temporary nature of projects limiting an organization's ability to retain staff, and the lack of funds to remunerate volunteer work were noted as additional reasons for staff shortages by 8% of respondents.

Internal Policies and Procedures

Most CSOs have financial reporting procedures in place (89%) and an accounting system (88%). Many have written procedures in place for programme development and planning (70%) as well as monitoring and evaluation (66%). By contrast, a little over half of CSOs have formal written policies on procurement (56%) and grant award management cycles (53%), while 50% of CSOs have their financial statements regularly audited by an independent auditor.

Among those surveyed, 39% of CSOs reported having policies for Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) with a notable difference according to the size of the organization: 71% of larger CSOs (with more than 36 employees) reported having a PSEA policies, followed by 39% of medium-size CSOs (with 6–35 employees), and 18% of small CSOs (with less than 5 employees). These results may be due to the fact that larger CSOs partner more often with UN agencies and need to abide by the UN requirements, including having a PSEA policy in place.



- We have more employees than needed
- We have the exact number of employees needed
- We are short of employees
- I don't know/I don't answer

Figure 12:
Staffing levels, N=197, % of organizations

[44] In June 2022, an assessment conducted by APSCF found that 69% of surveyed organizations reported difficulties in identifying qualified staff. This is significantly higher than the 46% CSOs reporting staffing difficulties in this study. This difference may be due to a difference in the sampling, or possibly due to a higher number of qualified staff available in the labor market following the completion of many refugee projects during the second year of the crisis, as well as to an increased capacity of the local labor force following a year of experience, particularly in the field of human rights and social protection.

Chapter IV
Collaboration, Coordination and Decision-Making

Typically, the civil society is the first responder in humanitarian settings, including community leaders, volunteers, and local CSOs and faith-based organizations present in the affected area. CSOs supplement government efforts and often address needs that might have been overlooked by the government. Collaboration among CSOs and other stakeholders creates synergy in planning and implementation and ensures there is no duplication in activities aimed at assisting those in need. Collaboration ensures there is proper coordination and optimal use of resources, thereby making humanitarian efforts efficient and timely.

Enabling CSOs to participate in refugee coordination structures, and to define the response agenda, ensures that vital sections of the society, especially at the grassroots level, are consulted and contribute with their unique expertise harnessed in response to a refugee influx.

Collaboration

High levels of collaboration [45] were reported among CSOs (79%), as well as between CSOs and local government (78%), and international NGOs (69%). Lower levels of collaboration were reported between CSOs and UN agencies (40%), central government (27%), educational institutions (3%) and private donors (1%). It should be noted that the largest UN agencies typically implement their programs through international and national NGOs, as many international NGOs that CSOs collaborate with are acting on behalf of a UN agency.

FGD respondents reported that productive collaboration among local CSOs led to strategic partnerships, helped them cover gaps in service provision and enhanced the efficiency of the response. Collaboration among CSOs included bilateral collaboration, as well as within and beyond existing CSO networks and coalitions, with special mention of the National Coalition "Life Without Violence", the Platform for Gender Equality and Alliance of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities. As one FGD participant noted:

> *We have ... good collaboration [and] ... joint projects. [Collaboration is important as] an organization cannot take care of all the needs, but in partnership it is easier.*
>
> FGD participant, WRO/WLO Chișinău

Levels of collaboration between CSOs and the local government differed by region: overall, CSOs from the South and Central regions reported fruitful collaboration, while CSOs from the North region and Chișinău municipality reported more challenges. For example, FGD respondents from the Center underlined productive collaboration with LPAs on responding to immediate refugee needs, as well as on social integration and cohesion initiatives, information support and legal assistance. [46] By contrast, FGD respondents from the North reported that LPA's capacity to manage and coordinate the response in that region was overstretched and CSOs were not able to benefit from needed LPA's support.

Respondents proposed building the capacity of LPAs and relevant national agencies to better coordinate the response to enhance their effectiveness. As noted by one respondent:

> *[LPAs] need to be supported with tools that enable them to be more efficient, fast and more flexible. Here, I think, organizations of the United Nations in Moldova could support.*
>
> FGD participant, Chișinău

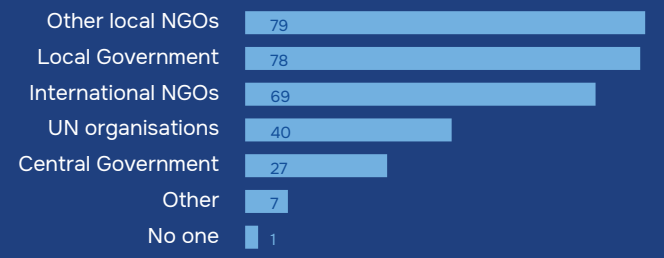


Figure 13:
Collaboration patterns (multiple choice), N=197, % of organizations

[45] Collaboration refers to working together through formal and non-formal partnerships in refugee response, often involving joint decision-making and exchange of funds, and implying a high degree of cooperation and mutual support among humanitarian actors.

[46] For example, local action plans for the refugee response were jointly drafted by CSOs and LPAs in Anenii Noi, Căușeni, Cahul, Orhei and Stefan Voda.

According to CSOs, population data is currently managed by each LPA individually, and is not centralized and easily accessible:

Establishing a common database to facilitate regular collection, management, distribution and analysis of harmonized statistical data at the local level could support this effort.

Collaboration between CSOs and UN Agencies was characterized as positive, with larger CSOs having a higher percentage of direct partnership with UN agencies than medium-sized and smaller CSOs. CSOs noted the important role of UN agencies and specifically UNHCR in supporting the Government of Moldova and organizations in the framework of the refugee response.

Among CSOs, WROs have the highest level of partnerships with INGOs (92%), WLOs with other CSOs (83%) and local government (83%), while MLOs have the highest levels of partnerships with the local government (71%). Overall, MLOs have reported lower levels of partnerships, compared to other types of organizations.

Regional differences in partnership patterns were observed: CSOs from the Chișinău municipality (81%), Transnistria region (76%) and North (74%) regions collaborated more with INGOs, compared to organizations from the South (52%) and Center (50%). Organizations from Transnistria region (59%) and Chișinău municipality (50%) partnered more with UN agencies and central government, than CSOs from other regions. Organizations from Transnistria region ranked highest for the collaboration among CSOs (86%), with many organizations establishing partnerships with 2 to 3 other CSOs to strengthen their efforts.

Constrained communication among CSOs was mentioned as hindering program coordination and joint fundraising efforts, as was limited awareness of "Services Advisor", a country-wide mapping of services available for refugees. With regard to communication modalities, surveyed CSOs reported that official meetings and communication channels were often less efficient and more cumbersome than more informal communication modalities such as SMS and group chats.

Surveyed CSOs noted that strengthening partnerships built on trust, respect and recognition of the unique experience, value and contribution of each local, national and international humanitarian actor were essential for effective program delivery and reciprocal learning.

Coordination

50% of surveyed CSOs were aware of the refugee coordination [48] structures established by the Government of Moldova and UNHCR to support the refugee response. Of these, 25% reported attending coordination meetings, while the other 25% were aware, but did not participate in the meetings. Conversely, 40% of surveyed CSOs reported being unaware of these structures.

CSOs from the Chișinău municipality (36%) and the North (32%) and South (28%) regions are more familiar with refugee coordination structures and participate in coordination meetings, as compared to CSOs from the Center (11%) and Transnistria region (7%).

> *There is no disaggregated [and centralized] information available. If you are to design a programme for older persons and look for data on elderly in the refugee population [in a particular area or region], you will not easily find it.*
>
> FGD participant, Chișinău

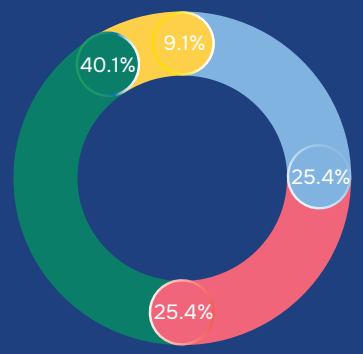


Figure 14: Familiarity with the refugee coordination structure, N=197, % of organizations

- Yes, and the organisation does participate in any meetings of the working groups under the refugee coordination structure
- Yes, but the organisation does not participate in any meeting of the working groups under the refugee coordination structure
- No, the NGO is not familiar with the refugee coorfination structure
- I don't know/I don't answer

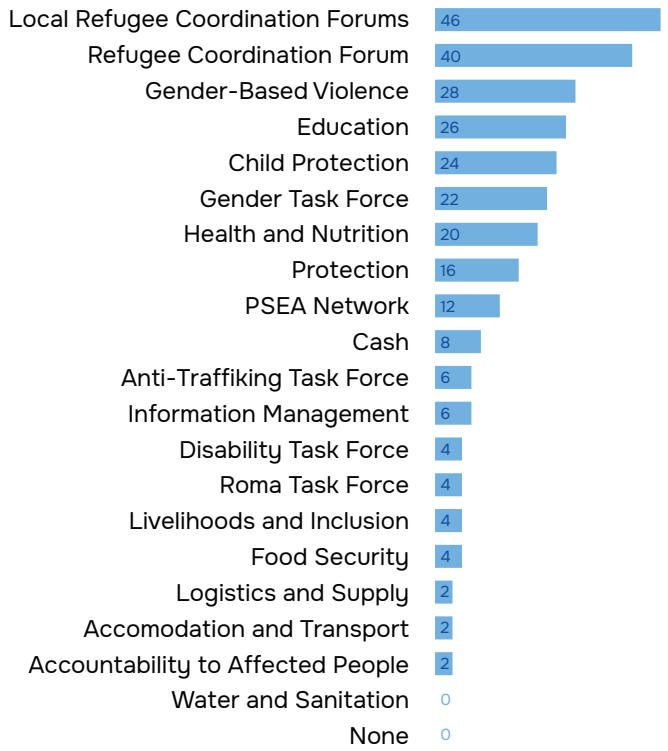


Figure 15:
Attendance of working groups (multiple choice), N=50, of organizations% [47]

WROs have a higher level of participation in coordination structures (58%), as compared to WLOs (22%) and MLOs (18%).

CSOs' capacity to engage in coordination structures, is directly related to the size of organization, with larger organizations participating at higher levels (54%), as compared to mid-sized (25%) and small CSOs (5%).

Among CSOs, 25% reported participating in coordination meetings in 2022 including: Refugee Local Coordination (46%), Refugee Coordination Forum (40%), Gender-Based Violence (28%), Education (26%), Child Protection (24%), Gender Task Force (22%) and Health and Nutrition (20%). A smaller proportion of organizations attended Protection (16%), Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (12%) and Cash (8%) coordination groups. [48]

Respondents reported that refugee coordination structures were positive because they: bring together a range of humanitarian stakeholders; offer an effective platform for communication, information sharing, and debate; create opportunities for partnership, and; serve as a platform to address time-sensitive challenges facing refugees. On the other hand, respondents reported that smaller CSOs and refugees were underrepresented in these groups and had limited opportunities to inform or influence discussion and decision making. Several also noted coordination forums rarely allow the time for more in depth discussions about pertinent issues - something that was felt lacking. Even when issues were identified in the context of the coordination forums, their ability to act was sometimes impeded by broader institutional or policy challenges:

> *We seem to know a lot about the response and the distinct needs of people, but sometimes when a specific problem arises, you realize that there are neither procedures nor protocols to solve it.*
>
> KII LPA

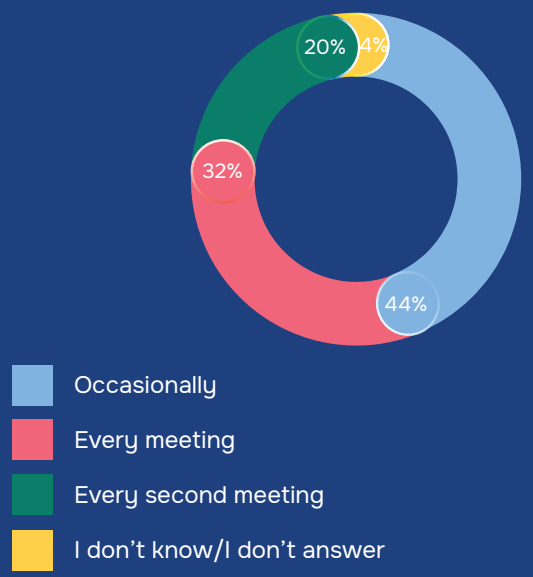


Figure 16:
Frequently of participation, N=50, % of organizations

[47] The survey used the term "Inter-Sector Coordination Group" when referring to the "Refugee Coordination Forum". The term has been changed in the report to ensure clarity for readers.

[48] Numbers in this paragraph do not necessarily reflect the number of local CSOs participating indifferent working groups, as some of the CSOs who actively participate in the RCF did not respond to the online survey.

Different types of CSOs engaged in coordination work and had varying areas of interest. In general, women organizations participate in coordination structures more than MLOs (58% WROs, 22% WLOs and 18% MLOs). WLOs are more present in the Local Refugee Coordination Forums, while WROs and MLOs in the National Refugee Coordination Forum. MLOs focus more on Livelihoods and Inclusion and Cash, while WLOs focus more on Child Protection, Education, PSEA, and Disability. WROs focus more on Gender, GBV, Education, Protection, Anti-Trafficking, and Roma.

In 2022, 32% of CSOs reported attending all coordination meetings, 20% reported attending every second meeting, while 44% of CSOs reported attending meetings only occasionally, due to a lack of time, the high frequency of meetings, or a lack of information about the meetings.

According to FGD and KII respondents, barriers to the effective and meaningful engagement of CSOs in refugee coordination structures include: limited communication about the existence of the coordination structure and the working groups themselves, as well as on the benefits of participation; lack of time and human resources forcing CSOs to prioritize response interventions over coordination meetings; disappointment about the effectiveness of the groups due to lack of action on issues CSOs bring to the table; and a failure to clearly see their role in the groups.

Lack of familiarity with humanitarian processes [49] was also reported as a barrier by 25% of CSOs, with a higher percentage of CSOs from Transnistria region (34%) reporting this compared to CSOs from other regions (23%-25%). Both WROs and MLOs (30-31%) identified this barrier more often than WLOs (22%), and medium-size CSOs (27%) reported it more often than small CSOs (18%) and large CSOs (13%).

According to respondents, strengthening CSO participation and engagement in coordination structures can be facilitated through: more accurate and efficient use of information (reported by 22% of respondents), including through information events, support with information on resources and funding, development and maintenance of an on online registry for services and service providers, and online platforms with regularly updated disaggregated data on refugee populations. Some 16% of CSOs said that strengthened partnerships with LPAs could boost their participation and engagement in refugee response and coordination. Additional suggestions for improved engagement in coordination structures included: well-structured meetings, greater decision and operational transparency of the working groups, regular publication of group materials online, presentations of good practices, including by CSOs, funding for humanitarian coordination posts in CSOs, trainings for staff, especially for newly-established organizations, and communicating information via regular post.

> *In terms of decision-making, I cannot say that smaller organizations have much influence. There are cases when the views and opinions of grassroots CSOs have been ignored in relation to assistance programmes or, [for example], draft temporary protection. Organizations have been involved, but less considered.*
>
> FGD participant, South

> *I think that large international organizations decide on the response, while local CSOs are only regarded as their partners implementing programmes and projects on the ground.*
>
> FGD participant, Chișinău

Decision-Making

According to KIIs respondents, larger national organizations or structures have more say in decision-making in the refugee response, while smaller grassroots CSOs have limited influence and must adapt to the decisions taken. Respondents noted that grassroots CSOs' views and opinions have not always been considered and/or endorsed, and that their overall impression was that they are regarded by international humanitarian actors more as partners implementing programs and projects on the ground rather than decision-makers.

[49] For example, humanitarian structures, procedures, etc.

Chapter V
Gender Responsive and Diversity Programming

Integrating gender equality and diversity into the refugee response is essential to ensure inclusive, effective, efficient, and empowering interventions that address the distinct needs of women, girls, men, and boys in all their diversity. This requires the regular collection and analysis of sex, age and disability disaggregated data, gender and intersectional analysis, documentation of gender- and intersectional-related issues, and the design, funding, and implementation of gender- and diversity-sensitive projects that ensure equitable treatment and access to services. Advancing gender equality and promoting a systemic intersectional approach is the responsibility of all actors and includes the promotion and empowerment of diverse women, women organizations, and other marginalized groups.

Women's Organizations in the Refugee Response

Women's organizations played a distinct and critical role in the refugee response in Moldova. They brought in-depth understanding of the context, local expertise, ownership, drive, women's perspective on the response, as well as access to local networks. They had a pronounced grassroots presence in the host communities and mobilized quickly to engage in the emergency. Moreover, they operationalized their links with other organizations and networks that supported their work and increased their impact, including through collaboration with INGOs and local government. Women's organizations had a higher participation rate in coordination structures as compared to other CSOs, with more focused attention on gender-specific and cross-cutting issues.

Being at the frontline of the response, women organizations regularly consulted with refugees, attempted to understand the particular needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls, and other marginalized groups and *"saw the problem from inside"*. [50] According to actors surveyed, WLOs and WROs more often offered NFIs (71% and 69% respectively), provided employment and financial inclusion services (26% and 50% respectively) and information (58% and 85% respectively) to refugees than MLOs. Interviews corroborated that women organizations had a particular role in advocating for the rights and needs of women and girls and adapting services to their gender-based needs across the country and in regions. This included through the provision of hygiene products, services for survivors of gender-based violence, food and clothing, housing assistance, psychological counseling and legal advice, as well as economic recovery and leadership training for refugee women and girls. Moreover, women organizations engaged to a higher extent in the provision of assistance to host communities on information (79%) and NFIs (64%), compared to MLOs. Respondents believed that refugee women had more trust in women organizations than in MLOs and government institutions.

WROs are more likely to have a gender-sensitive approach and to understand the specific needs and concerns of women, men, girls and boys. Particularly, WROs (46%), reported being more aware of the gender mainstreaming tools and able to integrate gender considerations into their programming as compared to MLOs (11%).

Women organizations also had a different focus on beneficiaries. They more often targeted adult women (89-92%), children and adolescents (69-88%) of both sexes, older women (60-69%) and women with chronic diseases (32-35%). Whereas WLOs had a more prominent focus than other CSOs on adult men (66%), older men (51%), WROs placed more emphasis on pregnant women (50%), women with disabilities (46%), lactating women (46%) and survivors of Gender-Based Violence (42%), Roma women (35%), women engaging in the sale and exchange of sex, including those resorting to survival sex (12%) [51].

WROs and WLOs engaged in the refugee response with an impressive level of dedication. On average, they managed similar budgets [52] and reached similar numbers of beneficiaries [53] as MLOs, but worked with half the staff and paid a higher toll of staff burnout (36% and 21% respectively,

[50] KII WRO, Chișinău.

[51] MLOs more often targeted men with disabilities (33%) and chronic diseases (29%), Roma men (29%), LGBTQIA+ persons (17%) and men living with HIV (12%), than women organizations.

[52] Average budget per organization: 138,494 USD for WROs, 117,603 USD for WLOs and 135,279 USD for MLOs

[53] Average number of beneficiaries per organization: 1,077 beneficiaries for WROs, 832 beneficiaries for WLOs and 1,107 beneficiaries for MLOs

against 6% for MLOs). At the same time, compared to MLOs, WROs and WLOs more often reported staff shortages (54% and 50% respectively as compared to 32% for MLOs) and inability to offer competitive salaries to meet the expectations of potential employees (86% and 81% respectively as compared to 56% for MLOs). Lack of funding for operational costs and institutional development was reported to affect WROs and WLOs to a greater extent than MLOs, with the latter indicating more often relying on their own funds and women organizations seeking greater support from INGOs and UN.

In early 2023, a higher percentage of women organizations reported a lack of funds for the refugee response than MLOs (82% WLOs, 77% WROs and 71% MLOs) and for gender-responsive programmes in particular (35% WROs, 23% WLOs and 11% MLOs).

A representative of a donor organization highlighted the need to continue to support women organizations to respond to gender-specific needs, prevent and respond to GBV, invest in the economic resilience of women and girls, as well as support leadership of women and girls in humanitarian response. The importance of institutional funding for organizational expenses, such as staff, costs, strategy development or training was stressed as key for the survival, development and expansion of women organizations, specifically those focusing on gender issues.

Gender- and Diversity-responsive Programming

According to some respondents, CSOs made dedicated efforts to address the distinct needs and priorities of refugee women, girls, boys and men in all their diversity in an equitable manner, an effort that became easier as the response progressed:

> *After a month or two, we began focusing more on individual needs of men, women, people with disabilities and children.*
>
> KII participant, LPA

Other respondents were more skeptical, noting that

> *Gender considerations have not been integrated [in the response], they were simply absent for women, men, and transgender persons. There was no emphasis on needs.*
>
> FGD participant, WRO/WLO Chișinău

Given the large proportion of women and children among the refugee population and thus the greater focus of programming on that population group, respondents observed that refugee men, adolescent boys and older men may have been inadvertently marginalized from some assistance programmes:

> *I think the different needs of women, men, boys and girls were addressed equally, but not equitably. More focus was put on women and girls in terms of information, empowerment and support, and less on men and boys.*
>
> FGD participant, South

FGDs respondents reported that refugee men may face discrimination and stigma,[54] may have distinct needs that are not being met, or may face distrust, including by CSOs themselves:

> *We don't know who they are, they may be former detainees. We don't feel safe, we don't trust them, and we don't help them so much.*
>
> WRO

Concerns about potential exclusion were also raised for LGBTQIA+ persons, older persons, and persons with chronic diseases and with disabilities.

> *Not enough attention is paid to the peculiarities of the marginalized groups, such as persons living with HIV, LGBTQIA+ persons, Roma, persons with loco motor and psycho-intellectual disabilities. There are few programmes that provide assistance specifically tailored to the needs of these groups. Moreover, there is little awareness in the society about the specific needs of these people and quite some prejudice and stigma around them, limiting their access to services and assistance, especially in case of Roma and LGBTQIA+ persons. As a societal problem, it has now been highlighted in the context of the refugee influx, as refugees with multiple layers of vulnerability may be double or triple marginalized from the necessary assistance.*
>
> FG participant, South

> *Older people are perhaps less involved, maybe even sometimes forgotten, and shyer ... they don't ask for help.*
>
> FG participant, Center

Gender Mainstreaming Capacities

A significant proportion of CSOs lack technical skills in gender equality programming, and few use available gender mainstreaming tools. During the onset of the refugee response, a gender checklist was elaborated by the Gender Task Force to provide humanitarian actors with practical tools for gender mainstreaming into the refugee response. More than half of CSOs surveyed (59%) were not familiar with the checklist, while 26% were familiar with it, but did not use it and only 21% of CSOs applied it in their work with refugees.

The use of gender equality tools appears to be correlated with the size, type and location of CSOs: gender considerations were integrated into programming by WROs (46%), large organizations (46%) and organizations located in

[54] For not having stayed in Ukraine to fight, despite having permission to leave.

Chișinău (29%). Gender responsive programming is being carried out by fewer MLOs (11%) and small organizations (5%). In terms of regional patterns, organizations from rural areas integrated gender considerations into their work to a lesser extent as compared to organizations located in Chișinău, South region having the lowest (14%), followed by North (16%) and Transnistria region (17%).

Out of 21% of CSOs that reported mainstreaming gender in their programmes, 31 organization (76%) collect sex, age and disability disaggregated data (SADDD), 24 CSOs (51%) use this data for gender analysis and 20 CSOs (49%) use SADDD and gender indicators for project planning, monitoring and evaluation. Some 23 CSOs (56%) who apply gender mainstreaming principles have mobilized resources to address the distinct needs of various groups of affected population, while 21 organizations (51%) ensured that women and men in all their diversity were equally included in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the projects.

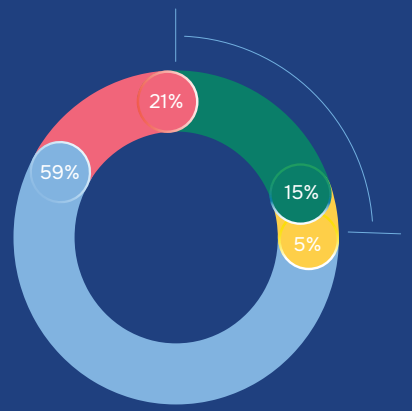
The research findings suggest a need for more awareness raising and capacity building on gender equality in general and, gender equality in humanitarian action in particular among CSOs. Specific topics include: gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive programming (38%), gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation (31%) SADDD (20%) and gender analysis (19%).

Lack of sex, age and disability disaggregated data was mentioned as a challenge by 8 large CSOs (33%) and 28 medium-sized CSOs (20%), with none of the small CSOs recognizing this as a challenge. 23% WROs, 20% MLOs and 18% WLOs indicated lack of sex, age and disability disaggregated data as a barrier for the design of the inclusive programmes.

Lack of research on gender and diversity was identified as a challenge by 21% of CSOs, out of which 22% are WLOs, 21% are MLOs and 19% are WROs. A greater share of organizations from the Center (28%) and South (28%) reported this as a challenge, as compared to organizations from the North (19%), Chișinău (19%) and Transnistria region (17%). A greater percentage of large CSOs (29%) reported this challenge, as compared to small CSOs (23%) and medium CSOs (20%).

Lack of funding for gender-responsive programmes was raised as a concern by 21% of CSOs. 35% of WROs and 23% of WLOs reported lack of funding for gender-responsive programmes more often, compared to a significantly smaller share of MLOs (11%). A greater share of organizations in the South (38%) reported lack of funding for gender-responsive programmes, compared to 23% in the North, 21% for the Chișinău municipality, and 14% for the Center and Transnistria region. The larger the CSO, the greater the proportion of those who reported lack of funding for gender-responsive programmes as a challenge, with 25% for large, 23% for medium and 14% for small CSOs.

Lack of funding for operational costs (46%), lack of skilled human resources (39%) and lack of funding for institutional development (34%) were reported as key barriers to deliver gender and diversity-responsive humanitarian programs. Although these challenges are of more general nature, they seem to compromise the organizational well-being and efficiency of CSO operations with long-standing impacts, including on the capacity to advance gender equality.[55]



Yes, and we apply Gender in Humanitarian Action checklist in our work with refugees

Yes, but we do not apply Gender in Humanitarian Action checklist in our work with refugees

No

Don't know

Figure 17:
Familiarity with the Gender in Humanitarian Action checklist, N=197, % of organizations

[55] WROs were more likely to be affected by a lack of funds for operational costs (58%) and institutional development (46%), compared to MLOs (48% and 32%) and WLOs (43% and 31%). Larger organizations are more affected by the lack of funding for operational costs (50%), lack of skilled human resources (50%) and lack of funding for institutional development (42%), compared to small and medium-size CSOs.

Conclusion

Moldovan CSOs, including WLOs and WROs, responded formidably to the refugee influx, in the face of limited resources, staff and experience working in humanitarian crises. Local CSOs coordinated together, pooled their resources, and collaborated closely among themselves as well as with central and local government, and international organizations, to respond to the needs of diverse groups of refugees. In the face of constraints, they delivered beyond their capacity and expectations. For this, they must be acknowledged and seen as equal partners in the response.

Women's organizations have played a critical role in advancing gender equality and women's rights in the refugee response, and were among the first actors to be on the front line. They are important partners in delivering gender-responsive services in emergencies, bringing local expertise, ownership, and women's perspectives.

CSOs, particularly smaller ones, reported facing challenges securing funding for the refugee response, due in part to complicated eligibility criteria and application procedures. For those who did access funds, they found reporting requirements to be time-consuming and burdensome, especially for CSOs with limited staff. Furthermore, inflexible and short-term grants made it difficult for CSOs to adapt to changing needs of refugees and to invest in medium- to long-term responses. The importance of institutional funding was stressed as key for the survival, development and expansion of women organizations, specifically those focusing on gender issues. Most CSOs surveyed reported not having secured funds for the 2023 refugee response, with a larger percentage of WLOs and WROs reporting this than MLOs.

Many CSOs reported staff shortages as one of the key organizational challenges, with WLOs and WROs struggling slightly more than MLOs to recruit qualified staff and offer competitive salaries. Understaffing in combination with the intense workload and emotional toll of the refugee response, has led to burnout and psychosocial distress among many frontline workers, with a higher percentage reported by WROs (36%) and WLOs (21%) than MLOs (6%).

Women organizations played a more active role in adapting services to gender-based needs of refugees from Ukraine. Typically, these services focused on GBV prevention, economic recovery, and leadership of refugee women and girls. CSO refugee response programs targeted a wide range of groups including women and girls, as well as men, LGBTQIA+ persons, male and female older persons, persons with chronic diseases and persons with disabilities. In some cases, services targeting the majority of the refugee population (women and girls) may have unintentionally excluded men, including older men, and adolescent boys from some assistance programs. Many CSOs also assisted vulnerable members of the host community affected by the refugee crisis, with WROs engaging to a higher extent than WLOs and MLOs in providing this support. A little over one fifth of CSOs reported mainstreaming gender into their programmes, out of which the majority carried out a gender analysis using sex, age and disability disaggregated data (SADDD).

Collaboration among CSOs, INGOs, and the UN was productive in enhancing the efficiency of the refugee response in Moldova, leading to strategic partnerships, while collaboration between CSOs and local governments varied across regions with both good practices and areas for improvement depending on the location. Despite efforts to involve local CSOs in refugee coordination structures, only one quarter of CSOs interviewed regularly participated in meetings, with low levels of participation attributed to a limited clarity among CSOs about their role in refugee coordination, their limited ability to influence decisions, and small numbers of staff which limited their capacity to attend many of the meetings.

In 2023, a greater number of CSOs plan to provide assistance to a greater number of refugees from Ukraine as well as to affected host populations throughout Moldova, with a slightly decreased outreach across regions. Assistance provided by surveyed CSOs will shift away from emergency provisions to focus on medium- to long-term assistance that addresses protection as well as social and economic inclusion in line with the broader refugee response priorities. Women, children and adolescents, men, and older persons will remain the focus of assistance, while marginalized and at-risk groups will be targeted to a greater extent as compared to 2022, including women and men living with HIV, women engaging in the sale and exchange of sex, including those resorting to survival sex, LGBTQIA+ persons, GBV survivors, Roma women and men, persons with chronic diseases and persons with disabilities.

Recommendations [56]

Investment and commitment to localization of the response in Moldova is necessary, with more focus on strengthening relationships, partnerships, and collaboration among local, national, and international organizations and donors built on trust, respect and recognition.

EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF RESPONSE:

1. **Enable CSOs to respond to evolving needs of all refugees and members of the host communities, including underserved, vulnerable and marginalized groups, including:**
   - Continue to invest in service delivery across Moldova to ensure all refugees and the most vulnerable members of the host communities have access to support regardless of location, including specific focus on rural areas and the Transnistria region.
   - Create regular forums for consultation between service providers, refugees and the most vulnerable members of the host communities to assess relevance of services and adapt to real needs.
   - Introduce flexibility in programme cooperation agreements so that CSOs can adapt to changing needs of affected people.
   - Invest in a "twin track" approach, combining both accessible/inclusive and targeted programmes to respond to needs of underserved groups including women with specific needs (pregnant, lactating, with infants and young children, survivors of the GBV, women engaging in the sale and exchange of sex, including those resorting to survival sex), people with disabilities and chronic diseases, Roma persons, women and men living with HIV, LGBTQIA+ persons, persons living in rural areas, adolescents, older persons, and male refugees.
   - Tap into knowledge of local CSOs who work directly with refugees to tailor response in line with local needs in the framework of consultation and coordination forums.
   - Partner with and support existing services under the national social protection system and in line with the ongoing social assistance system reform [57], such as local town halls that provide a one-stop shop for citizens and refugees.
   - Invest in addressing medium- and long-term needs including those related to employment, business development, legal services, specialized medical services, educational services, and social and economic integration support.
   - Encourage CSOs to deliver programs across humanitarian, development and peace nexus to effectively address the needs of the refugees and the members of the host communities, reinforce the national protection systems in place and contribute to the maintenance of peace in Moldova.

[56] These recommendations include suggestions provided by CSOs during focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

[57] Implemented under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and to be finalized by 2026. More details can be found here.

2. **Strengthen CSO's ability to collect and use sex–, age- and disability-disaggregated data in analysis to identify and respond to specific needs of distinct groups in specific sectors, including:**
   - Collect, consolidate and analyze existing sex-, age and disability data (SADDD) on refugees, needs, capacities and priorities and disseminate in a timely and effective manner to relevant actors, including through online easily accessible resources to improve efficiency of service delivery, in line with General Data Protection Regulation, confidentiality, ethical and protection considerations.
   - Continue investing in a comprehensive online service database to enhance planning and ensure that information about services available to refugees and CSOs that can direct refugees accordingly.
   - Address barriers in formal communication channels that hinder effective and efficient flow of information between relevant humanitarian stakeholders, while promoting coordination between humanitarian, development and peace actors.
3. **Enable CSOs to promote social cohesion and strengthen relationships between host communities and refugees, including:**
   - Prioritize projects that work on social cohesion and inclusion, as well as ensure that both refugees and host communities [58] benefit from their interventions and support.
   - Continue investing in awareness raising campaigns [59] for refugee and host community populations to address misinformation and grounds for tensions.

FUNDING:

4. **Facilitate efforts by CSOs across Moldova, including smaller CSOs and CSOs from Transnistria region, to access funding for humanitarian response, including:**
   - Prioritize localization of funding to achieve 25% of humanitarian funding channeled as directly as possible to local and national responders.
   - Provide coaching, orientation and training to CSOs on how to apply for funding and enhance understanding of relevant application procedures.
   - Simplify funding application procedures, adjust eligibility criteria and funding windows so that smaller CSOs can also benefit from accessing funds.
   - Expedite application procedures so that accessing funding is more efficient and planned services are timely.
   - Explore opportunities for longer term and flexible [60] funding to support more relevant and sustainable responses.
   - Increase information on funding opportunities, including through the creation of a donor database so that CSOs know where they can apply for resources.
   - Support CSOs in diversifying their funding sources, including promoting their access to non-humanitarian funding opportunities, such as development grants and government funding.
   - Create additional opportunities for dialogue and promote effective communication between donors and CSOs, including through inviting CSOs to participate in donor roundtables.
   - Provide equal support for CSOs on the left and right shore of Nistru river, in line with refugee needs.

> *"On the right bank the assistance is more comprehensive, in Transnistria, unfortunately, is limited by the opportunities we have. If we met with donors more often, if donors listened to our problems more often, maybe then we would have more support."*
>
> FGD participant, Transnistria region

[58] Needs of the host population include food items, support to cover utility costs, hygiene products, mattress/blankets/linens, support for home repair and improvement of living conditions; MHPSS support, information on support services.

[59] For example, on the rights and responsibilities of refugees; origins and distribution of humanitarian funds; available services for refugees and host communities, with a particular focus on minority groups.

[60] Allowing for easy and quick budget revisions and reprogramming to align with the changing context and needs.

- Introduce feminist funding principles at each stage of grant processes, including consultations with CSOs before launching a call for proposals and collectively identify funding gaps and opportunities, provision of support throughout the project cycle, simplifying application and reporting processes.

5. **Facilitate humanitarian reporting, in particular for smaller CSOs, including:**
   - Introduce simplified reporting procedures for smaller CSOs and/or explore the option of subcontracting larger CSO to subcontract smaller CSOs with simplified procedures.
   - Ensure reporting frameworks with required indicators are clear at the start of a cooperation.

STRENGTHENING CAPACITY:

6. **Invest in institutional development of CSOs, in particular smaller CSOs, WROs, WLOs and RLOs, including:**
   - Provide funding for core costs including infrastructure (e.g. office, desk, meeting rooms, office equipment) and operational costs (e.g. rent, core staff) for CSOs, in particular WROs, WLOs and RLOs.
   - Invest in training, coaching and mentoring of CSO management and staff in project management, humanitarian coordination and response.
   - Continue ongoing support to CSOs to strengthen their PSEA capacity, especially for smaller CSOs and MLOs Enhance capacity of CSOs to ensure core standards, for example on protection, are in place, including by developing a set of minimum standards to ensure consistency and quality of services.
7. **Invest in attracting and retaining qualified CSO staff, including:**
   - Provide resources to support staff salaries, staff training and coaching to attract and retain qualified staff (including those with technical skills in MHPSS, GBV prevention, etc. as needed).
   - Provide resources for well-being, MHPSS support and supervision to staff to prevent burn out.
   - Facilitate the collaboration of CSOs with higher educational institutions so that students volunteer within CSOs.
   - Invest in education or certificate programmes on project management or CSO management to improve professionalization of the CSO sector.
8. **Strengthen emergency preparedness and response capacity of the local government through financial resources and technical support, including through investment in data collection and management systems.**

STRENGTHENING GENDER AND DIVERSITY RESPONSIVE PROGRAMS

9. **Continue strengthening the capacity of CSOs to carry out gender-responsive and intersectional programming, including:**
   - Continue building capacity of CSOs on collection and analysis of sex, age and disability disaggregated data.
   - Continue identifying and supporting methodologies, to help CSOs collect, manage and analyze SADDD in a more efficient way.
   - Continue building capacity of CSOs on key technical areas, including gender-responsive and intersectional programming, SADDD, monitoring, evaluation and learning, gender and intersectional analysis, and GBV prevention and response.
10. **Continue strengthening technical capacity of CSOs to provide targeted humanitarian assistance, including:**
    - Continue providing coaching for CSOs during project implementation.
    - Continue building technical capacity of CSOs to support underserved groups, including with multiple layers of vulnerability (e.g. refugees living with HIV, LGBTQIA+ persons, GBV survivors, persons with disabilities, Roma, etc.).
    - Continue building technical capacity of CSOs in leadership, project management, fund-raising, data analysis, gender equality, gender-sensitive programming and English.

COLLABORATION, COORDINATION & DECISION-MAKING

11. **Continue to strengthen inclusivity of coordination mechanisms, including the Refugee Coordination Forum, to facilitate greater participation in particular of smaller CSOs, including:**
    - Continue to build on good practices so that smaller CSOs or those with limited staff, can participate including scheduling hybrid meetings at strategic times, providing simultaneous interpretation, and running local refugee coordination forums in the local language.
    - Enhance the ability of CSOs to influence decisions in refugee coordination frameworks, and inform them how they can play a strategic role in refugee coordination.
    - Ensure relevant information about the refugee response reaches actors in a timely and inclusive way, and ensure coordination meetings are well-structured and action oriented.
    - Document good practices in humanitarian coordination (thematic and cross-sectoral) to inform and strengthen coordination mechanisms across Moldova. Facilitate experience exchange on coordination from other contexts.

- Invite refugee representatives to join coordination structures to strengthen meaningful participation of the affected people.
- Continue to invest in the development and maintenance of the centralized data systems on services (Services Advisor), service providers and coordination (Operational Data Portal), and raise awareness about these systems among CSOs.
- Ensure appropriate budgetary provisions for sufficient coordination staff in CSOs.
- Promote greater integration between development, humanitarian and peace coordination mechanisms to promote meaningful participation of CSOs in the delivery of and the decision making around humanitarian, development and peace agendas in a more sustainable and inclusive manner.

12. Strengthen coordination, collaboration and peer learning among CSOs across Moldova, including:

- Foster platforms enabling CSOs from all over Moldova, including Transnistria region, to exchange experiences, share good practices, promote learning and strengthen response.
- Support coordination efforts or joint delivery by smaller CSOs to provide complementary services and address needs in a locally relevant and comprehensive manner.
- Support mentoring and peer learning opportunities, especially for small CSOs.

13. Create more opportunities for meaningful participation and decision making of smaller CSOs and specialized CSOs in the refugee response, including:

- Building on good practices of involving CSOs in RRP planning, organize dedicated consultations with WROs, WLOs, RLOs, OPDs [61] and LGBTQIA+ organizations. Invite CSO representatives to strategic discussions with the government, UN, INGOs and local authorities, and include CSOs representatives in ongoing sector processes including involving them in decision-making.
- Document CSO inputs and suggestions in meeting minutes, and revisit actions in follow-up meetings.

  Provide due credit for CSOs as equal partners in the response as relevant.

14. Strengthen collaboration between CSOs and state structures at the national, regional and local levels, including:

- Continue strengthening Local Refugee Coordination Forums, enhancing coordination between members of civil society and representatives of LPAs.
- Building on the good practice of the Local Refugee Coordination Forums, document good practices of positive collaboration between CSOs and LPAs in relevant regions, and use learning to strengthen cooperation in other regions.
- Invest in strengthening capacities of LPA in emergency preparedness and practical tools to facilitate their coordination with CSOs and other actors.
- Support and foster partnerships between CSOs and state structures to deliver effective and inclusive assistance to refugees and the most vulnerable members of the host communities, while promoting social cohesion and inclusion, and reinforcing the national social protection system.
- Continue fostering forums for collaboration, coordination, consultations and policymaking to promote human rights across humanitarian, development and peace nexus.

> *I think that … it would be good to have a meeting with all CSOs that are in the field and that have … projects with … common objectives to exchange experience.*
>
> FGD participant, Transnistria region

[61] Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

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